

FINAL REPORT
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**Integrating Children's Perspectives in Policy-making
to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion Experienced
by Single Parent Families:
A Transnational Comparative Approach**

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POVERTY, EXCLUSION & SOCIAL INEQUALITIES



A Project Funded under the Second Transnational Exchange Programme aimed at promoting the exchange of learning and best practice between member states on policies and programmes to combat and prevent poverty and social exclusion (VP/2004/004)

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KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Family and Family Life

- The complexity and diversity of single parent families must be taken into consideration when policy development and decisions are made.
- Policy makers should be cautious about taking ‘narrow’ definitions of the family and should consider the roles and significance of extended families, networks and communities.
- All policies need to be aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- It is important that policy overtly recognises and acknowledges the strengths and perceived benefits of single parenthood for some families. Within this, the discourse related to single parent families needs to avoid discriminating attributions and assumptions related to perceived links to social problems.
- It is important that policy is developed through a family diversity discourse in which lone parenthood is conceived as a normal stage of the life cycle and the contribution that single parents bring to society in caring for their children single-handed is acknowledged.
- Support should be given to enable communities and local networks to develop appropriate, self-help and supportive systems that enable single parents to make contacts, exchange ideas and share experiences.
- Local and national policies need to ensure that access to appropriate professional support and guidance is available for single parents and their children.
- There should be consideration given to the development of more educational programmes focussing on the role of parents and parenting that includes the role of fatherhood in changing family life.
- Policies need to support investment into programmes of family mediation.
- The policy discourses need to align, so that employment policy initiative explicitly take account of and reflect family and welfare policies. Thus flexible working arrangements and equitable, accessible part-time work need to be available across the whole employment sector, rather than reflected in jobs that are often low-paid, manual and at un-sociable hours.
- The social welfare benefits systems in all countries needs to reflect the balance of family policy and employment policy in relation to parity of financial benefits for single parents and those in part-time work.

- Policies need to provide greater support to the parent and in this way, they will relieve the pressure on the child. It is therefore necessary to explicitly acknowledge the different pressures and issues for individuals within the family and ensure child focussed/ family-member focussed policies rather than ‘family’ focussed – given the different meanings attributed to the term ‘family’.

Financial Issues

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the child should underpin all policy-making on child poverty. The financial difficulties faced by many single parent families may lead them below the poverty line with all the associated consequences brought about by social and economic exclusion. Policies should ensure a minimum income for all single parent families according to family size and provide these families with appropriate tax relief to supplement their income.

Divisions in Poor Communities

- Income poverty can lead to divisions between different ethnic groups in some poor communities, with children drawn into the animosity. Politicians need to address income, employment and education policies that build community cohesion in poorer communities, otherwise more divisive policies could lead to cynicism, bigotry and racism at a young age.

Family Friendly Employment

- Children want their single parent to earn more and work less. Single parents’ caring responsibilities, inflexible working conditions and the lack of skills and training support, before and after the take up of paid work, are all central causes for the poverty experienced by children in single parent families. Programs which offer single parents opportunities for more skilled full or part-time employment should form the core of policy efforts to support single parent families.
- Policies, however, need to ensure the multiple demands placed upon single parents and the often resulting problem of time poverty are balanced with the benefits accruing from employment.
- More holistic measures are needed dove-tailing together across government departments to address single parents and thereby child poverty.

Childcare

- Investment in affordable, quality state childcare that fits into working hours is vital if single parents are to balance their caring responsibilities with earning an income. Reliance on older children, particularly daughters, places unfair pressure on the whole family. The subsidy of informal childcare provided by relatives would help parents to manage atypical hours.

Child Maintenance

- Where maintenance cannot be agreed amicably between parents or speedily through the court system, the economic pressure on single parents and children will be dramatically reduced by a policy which guarantees the monthly maintenance to all single parent families by the state and also makes the state responsible for collecting the maintenance. Similarly, the state should take the responsibility for guaranteeing continued maintenance support for those over 18 (without the child needing to resort to legal measures) provided that he/she is still dependent on the single parent family (e.g. university students, etc).

Housing

- Policies need to take into account the housing needs of single parent families and provide such allowances and housing provision which enable single parent families to live in secure, social environments that guarantee the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many single parent families face serious problems with housing including sub-standard provision, the high costs for renting or buying a house, inadequate space in the house and in some cases the lack of basic amenities. Policies which provide for investment in good quality social housing and housing subsidies based on need should be further supported while lower-rate housing loans should be made available to single parent families.
- EU countries with weak hostel and housing infrastructures supporting women escaping domestic violence, should begin to make the link between violence and women's poverty and invest in supportive re-housing programmes.

Community

- Single parent children's view of social exclusion having a relational element i.e. exclusion from friendship, needs to be taken into account by policy makers. Local governments need to invest in providing safe, affordable places for children to interact with one another and engage in social activities.
- Strong recommendations come from single parent children for cheap, local leisure facilities (playgrounds, swimming pools, football fields, gymnasiums etc), and youth and community clubs.
- Policies are needed which allow for accessible and subsidised transport so that single parent children, especially those living in rural areas, can access play and leisure facilities.
- The organisation of subsidised local cultural and social events for children, especially in rural areas, would offer opportunities for single parent children to play and socialise and help combat social exclusion.
- Policies are required that help relieve time and financial pressures on single parents, so reducing pressures on single parent children to provide care and support in the home and freeing them to spend more time with friends. In particular, childcare needs to be more accessible and affordable.

School Life

- There is a need for more coordination of support services provided to children through school in order to increase the effectiveness of such support.
- Educational policy should aim to establish adequate counseling services in schools in order to provide children with free and accessible counseling services when they need them. It is also important that such services are provided in discreet ways that avoid stigmatizing children. At the same time, it is imperative to educate children about the normality of seeking counseling and other psychological support when they need it.
- The role of teachers in supporting children from single parent families needs to be further enhanced and supported by institutional structures and provisions (e.g., training, work load reductions, etc) as children find this kind of support very important.

- Educational policies should take into account the particularities and limitations of single parents and devise mechanisms that support the role of parents in their children's schooling and to facilitate the communication between teachers and parents.
- States should provide subsidies and other allowances to cover the increasingly high costs of extra lessons for poor, single parent families.
- Teacher training needs to incorporate training on family diversity with a particular emphasis on single parent families given the widespread presence of this social phenomenon.
- Teachers need to be trained on issues related to emotional intelligence and in providing basic academic and emotional support to their students, not as alternatives to other kinds of support (e.g., professional psychological support) but as part of the educational support that they can provide to their students. At the same time that teachers should be trained in providing basic emotional support to students, they should also be trained in ethics and be sensitized to issues of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality all of which are of significance to children as revealed through this study.
- Teacher training needs to incorporate training on issues related to poverty and social exclusion and how these relate to different family types including single parent families as well as to children's academic performance. Furthermore, teacher training needs to incorporate training on the diverse forms of single parent families, the role of the extended family and of friends in children's lives, the impact of time poverty on single parent families and children in particular, as well as on issues of institutional discrimination.
- School curricula (e.g., teachers' guides, textbooks, etc) need to be revised in such a way as to reflect the contemporary social realities of family diversity. At the same time, school curricula need to take into account various other parameters of family diversity that provide for an informed understanding of family diversity without the risk of stereotyping different family types. With regards to single parent families, school curricula need to address, among others, the diverse types of single parent families, the role of the extended family and of friends, the role of poverty and social exclusion in single parent families, and the impact of time poverty.

- Educational materials which support the role that trained teachers may play in addressing issues of family diversity should be produced and incorporated in mainstream curricula.
- To provide teachers with the relevant support, emotional intelligence should be integrated in school curricula and appropriate materials produced as tools for teachers to use when providing emotional support to children.

School Textbooks

- Generally school curricula should provide present time perception of gender roles and family structures. Recommendations are here made towards including the new realities and needs of modern society and single parent families after separation, divorce or no marriage, and assisting socialization in the present social situation. In this way children from single parent families and from families with new needs will be more at home and better accepted by themselves and their peers and women will expect more of themselves.
- Secondary school curricula should provide students with realistic perceptions of gender roles and family structures. Recommendations are made towards including in widely used books (reading books, social subjects etc) the new roles and changing family structures. The aim should be to influence children towards an equal women- men social role, and children from single parent families to be more at home, more accepted by themselves and their peers and more able to cope with issues that are related to the changes observed.

School Practices and Procedures

- Only when children from SPFs experience difficulties with their behaviour or education is it thought beneficial to know more details about the child's specific family background and circumstances, to enable the school to more effectively help the child.
- Children from SPFs should be treated as individuals and not be labelled in any official or unofficial way. However, based on the expressed views of teachers in Greece and Cyprus, the provision of training on how to best deal with issues

concerning single parenthood and family life in single parent families is recommended.

- Although a teachers' guide specifically focused on SPFs is considered either inappropriate (as was the case with the teachers interviewed in England) or far too limited thematically (as was the case with the teachers interviewed in Greece and Cyprus), teachers, especially in Greece and Cyprus, where public debate on SPFs is relatively limited, would welcome a guide on family diversity issues, providing instructions on how to best educate children on the diversity of contemporary forms of family life.
- The range of good practices of educational and behavioural support practiced by the schools researched in England should be used as examples for the Greek and Cypriot school procedures and practices, which should use inclusion and achievement as general themes in their provision of support for children experiencing difficulties. Additionally, Greece should institute services of educational and emotional/behavioural support and formal referral procedures to those for children experiencing particular difficulties.

Cross National Analysis

KEY SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Family and Family Life

1. Diversity of the single parent family unit (including normality of single parenthood)

In each of the participating countries; Greece; Cyprus and England, it was noted that the single parent family cannot easily be defined, as in reality, the structure of single parent families is fluid, diverse and changes with time. Defining and understanding the single parent family is therefore subjective and the ways in which family life is construed need to respond to the changing realities of contemporary life and people's experiences, in this way, recognising the fluidity and dynamics of family life. As a subjective, socially constructed notion, there is significant variety in the meanings and perceptions attributed to the concept of the single parent family. In each country, it was evident that children, from both single and two parent families, have a social understanding of their families and articulate experiences that do not always easily relate to the policy discourse. For children it was apparent that 'family' was more often defined in terms of significant relationships rather than necessarily only close blood-relatives.

It could be argued that in some ways, children had a more sophisticated understanding of the role of the extended family than policy makers, in providing financial and emotional support, including care, leisure activities, and time to listen. Whilst the research data demonstrates significant parallels between the countries in respect of family diversity, it is evident that single parenthood is seen as a more usual, normal, regular and even expected form of family structure in England, than in the other two participating countries, where single parenthood is more likely to be constructed as 'different' or 'other'.

Despite the stark variations in meanings attributed to the concept of the single parent family, it is manifestly clear from the data that those who consider themselves to live in single parent families express a range of common experiences, benefits and concerns, many of which are explored further in this report.

'I've a little sister who lives here, who's got the same mum as me and another dad. My dad has other children. I've an older brother who's 18 and two older

sisters who are 16 and 17 I think. And I have a little brother who's 12 and another on the way. I see my dad at weekends' (Hannah, England, girl, single parent child, 14 years)

'I learned when I was grown up that I have half-brothers and sisters, about 5 or 6, but I haven't met all of them because I don't have any contact with my father.' (Niki, girl, 15 years, Athens, urban area).

'The fact that my mother has a boyfriend, because he can come everyday to our house . . . I'm also home'. On the other hand (...) one boy for example called his mother's boyfriend 'dad' and he feels wonderful when he is with them.' (Extract from Cyprus national report, page 108).

2. The role of extended family and family friends

The role and significance of extended families, communities and networks has been highlighted previously. However, the research findings provide evidence, from across each of the three participating countries, that the support, particularly in terms of child care and financial help, is substantial and noteworthy in itself. Most commonly this support is forthcoming from Grandparents, and is often to facilitate the parent being able to sustain employment. Thus in Greece it was noted that the emotional, financial and practical support of grandparents is very effective and in Cyprus children whose single parent works full-time were often cared for by their grandparents, when they are accessible and available. In many cases grandparents also play an important support role with children's transportation to school and out of school activities as well as helping the family financially. In England, it was apparent that time spent with grandparents sometimes also provided the mechanism by which contact with the absent parent could be enabled.

'At the weekends I go to Nanas. I sleep Saturday and Sunday night...so my mum can get some peace.' (Annie, girls, single parent child, 8 years, urban, England)

3. Perceived benefits of single parenthood

Across the three countries participating in this research, as might be expected, a range of experiences and perceptions of single parenthood were put forward. Within this, whilst there were concerns and issues highlighted (that are explored elsewhere in this report) there was also a degree of commonality about the advantages and strengths of growing up in a single parent family. Some examples

of the positive aspects highlighted by the children and young people include; relief from stress; absence of conflict and tension; stability and emotional security; freedom from violence; and having closer family bonds. Similarly the adults, who participated in the research, recounted feeling more in control, free to make decisions and, for some, living without tension and potential violence.

‘My parents have divorced but I have a very good time with my mum, I have a good time with my dad as well; he has more money than we do and we still have a good time (. . .). Now that dad left, mum takes better care of us (. . .) we have everything. (Koulla, girl, aged 13 years, Cyprus)

‘I like it very much that we are only two women at home. There is no male presence, because men’s exuberance annoys me!’ (Elli, girl, aged 15, suburban Athens)

‘You look after your family more which makes you more of a close family whereas some people who live in normal families, they’re not as close. If you’re in a single parent family you must have had a rough patch somewhere so it kind of brings you together as a family’ (Isabel, girl, single parent child, age 16 years, England)

4. Covert stigmatisation of single parenthood

The research findings indicate that across each country the issue of discrimination and stigma is not overtly evident. In Greece, for example, very few incidents of discrimination towards children from single parent families were reported. Similarly in Cyprus most single parents felt that (with few exceptions) the children and parents from two parent families treated the children from single parent families with little discrimination. And in England there were very few examples of children feeling or experiencing any overt stigma as a consequence of living in a single parent family.

There is, however, another common theme in the research findings, that to some extent runs counter to the notion of there being little discrimination, in that there is evidence of greater stigmatisation of those single parent families that live in rural areas. For example, in Cyprus, single mothers experienced some sexual harassment from older men in their communities, and in England it was noted that where comparatively fewer single parents live in isolated rural communities, there was potential for judgemental attitudes to pervade.

Further to this, the data shows that parents and children living in single parent families may experience more covert forms of stigmatisation and discrimination. Such perspectives may arise from policy, political or media rhetoric that frames two parent families as the ideal, perfect model, with children from single parent families being potential problems for society, or single parent families themselves as being an expensive burden on society. Consequentially, particularly in the data from rural areas it was found that single parents may feel inadequate, judged or undervalued.

‘My child is negatively affected psychologically when he hears his friends saying that they are doing things with their parents. He is asking why he doesn’t have a father to do things with.’ (Single mother, rural area, Cyprus)

‘People judge us – as if we made the choice to be single parents’ (Single mother, rural area, England)

‘One disadvantage of being a single parent is the social stigma. My child had problems with the teachers and with other children because his father had not acknowledged him. When eventually the child was acknowledged, the change in surname took a long time because of the headmaster’s bureaucratic attitude.’ (Ioanna, single mother, Athens urban area)

5. Difficulty for single parents of handling all parental roles

Whilst children voiced emotional needs in respect of the non-resident parent, it was also apparent through the children’s experiences and the views of their parents, that single parents feel challenged by some of the expectations that face them. Thus a mother from Cyprus comments ‘*my children don’t have a male role model to look up to*’ and similarly in Greece single parents stressed concerns about the lack of the male or female model. “*The absence of one of the parents is important for the children. The mother’s care is different*”. (Odysseas, male single parent, Athens, urban area), And a mother from England states that ‘*playing all the different roles, you are responsible for everything...*’ (Female, single parent, England).

Two parent family parents, recognising how they shared distribution of parental roles, and the support they give each other, readily acknowledged the challenges and potential stresses of single parenthood linked to the single parent having to take on all parental roles.

6. Children's relationship with their single parent (and with their absent parent)

As has been noted, children experience family life in a variety of structures, forms and settings, however, the significance of the relationship with their parent or parents is a consistent theme throughout the data from across all three participant countries. The majority of children and young people from single parent families who were involved in this research lived with their mother and described strong emotional and supportive bonds.

'I love staying up and watching a movie just me and my mum sitting on the sofa.' (Evie, girl, single parent child, 8 years old, England)

In Greece, the research findings revealed that even if there are tensions within the single parent family, ties between the child and resident parent are very close'. Similarly in Cyprus, children recounted a range of activities that they enjoyed with their parent and talked about wanting more quality time together in this way.

Absent parents, most commonly fathers were also referred to by the interviewees and focus group participants. Children express a need for contact and access to the non-resident parent, even where, in parallel, they describe difficulties, tensions and problems with the relationships between the non-resident parent, the resident parents and themselves and/or siblings. Older children, in particular, conveyed a desire to interact with both parents, suggesting feelings of anger, sadness, rejection and confusion where such contact had not been possible.

'My father told me on my last birthday that he was going to give me a computer as a present. I am still waiting for it. On Christmas he didn't give me any present, same goes for Easter. Now he tells me that he is going to give me a present for my birthday, but .. .' (Girl, aged 12 years, Cyprus)

'I would talk to my parents and ask them not to quarrel about trivial and unimportant things' (Girl, aged 11 years, Greece)

'The most difficult thing is not spending enough time with my dad really. He might like expect me to phone him, but he's a parent so he should be taking care of me and phone me. If he really cared he'd phone me every weekend and see how I was getting on at school, spend time with me and help me to do my course work'. (Leah, Girl aged 15 years, England)

7. Importance of quality time – time poverty

The research data provides evidence of the support needed by single parent families from different sources. In particular it was found that ‘time poverty’ was a key feature of the lives of the children and adults living in single parent families. Single parents experience pressures and tensions because societal expectations and financial need impel them into employment, whilst the needs of their children and their own expectations of parenthood suggest that they do not spend enough quality time in the family.

‘Basically, I don’t spend so much time with her [i.e. her mother], because now she has to go to court, she also has to work and she needs time to rest . . . I would like to spend more time with her, but because I can’t, I cannot do anything about this.’ (Girl, aged 11 years, Cyprus)

‘I’d like to spend more time with him and go out places, but he’s really too busy all the time so sometimes I get a bit upset because we don’t spend much time together. I come home from school and my dad has to go off to work straight away then I have an empty house to myself and I get upset, so that’s why I spend more time with friends’. (Katie, Girl, Single parent children 16 years, England)

‘Some children would like to spend more time with their parent, but this is not possible because of increased workload: *“If I was more at home, my sons would perform better at school”*. (Eleftheria, female single parent, Athens, urban area). In other cases, the mother may be present at home, but she is not available. *“My mother has to take care of my sister who is sick. My brother is working so I have to fend for myself”* (Giannis, 14 year old boy, Athens)

Significantly, from the child’s perspective, it is important that they spend more time with their single parent so they can have a closer, stronger relationship. In Cyprus, children talked about wanting more attention from their parent and to be able to engage in common activities. Single parent children in England, teenagers especially, complained about restricted opportunities to talk with their single parent about the things which are important to them. As Leah explained, they can feel neglected, angry and frustrated by their parent’s lack of availability.

‘I mind that my mother has to go to work, I stay with my grandmother. When she comes from work she picks me up, then she goes to sleep. I need her to give me a lot of attention.’ (Girl, single parent child, 7 years, Cyprus)

‘It’s utopia to expect more time with my mother. But if we had more time, I would like to talk more with her’. (Elias, boy, 15 years, Athens inner-city area).

‘Sometimes I want to tell my mum...I get annoyed and sometimes wound up about it as well. I feel really stressed out. Sometimes I get a bit angry and I know I shouldn’t.’ (Leah, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban, England)

8. Recommendations

- The complexity and diversity of single parent families must be taken into consideration when policy development and decisions are made.
- Policy makers should be cautious about taking ‘narrow’ definitions of the family and should consider the roles and significance of extended families, networks and communities.
- All policies need to be aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- It is important that policy overtly recognises and acknowledges the strengths and perceived benefits of single parenthood for some families. Within this, the discourse related to single parent families needs to avoid discriminating attributions and assumptions related to perceived links to social problems.
- It is important that policy is developed through a family diversity discourse in which lone parenthood is conceived as a normal stage of the life cycle and the contribution that single parents bring to society in caring for their children single-handed is acknowledged.
- Support should be given to enable communities and local networks to develop appropriate, self-help and supportive systems that enable single parents to make contacts, exchange ideas and share experiences.
- Local and national policies need to ensure that access to appropriate professional support and guidance is available for single parents and their children.
- There should be consideration given to the development of more educational programmes focussing on the role of parents and parenting that includes the role of fatherhood in changing family life.
- Policies need to support investment into programmes of family mediation.
- The policy discourses need to align, so that employment policy initiative explicitly take account of and reflect family and welfare policies. Thus flexible working arrangements and equitable, accessible part-time work need to be available across

the whole employment sector, rather than reflected in jobs that are often low-paid, manual and at un-sociable hours.

- The social welfare benefits systems in all countries need to reflect the balance of family policy and employment policy in relation to parity of financial benefits for single parents and those in part-time work.
- Policies need to provide greater support to the parent and in this way, they will relieve the pressure on the child. It is therefore necessary to explicitly acknowledge the different pressures and issues for individuals within the family and ensure child focussed/ family-member focussed policies rather than ‘family’ focussed – given the different meanings attributed to the term ‘family’.

Financial Issues

1. Income Poverty

Interviews with children across Cyprus, England and Greece, indicate that poverty is by far the most important factor responsible for the problems that children face in single parent families. Whilst a number of children in all countries state that they are happy with the financial situation of their family, the great proportion of children not only state that they have a financial problem, but also that the financial problem is the most important problem that their families face.

They feel they do not have nearly as much money as they would like, either as a family or individually. Disposable household income is considered particularly low if the single parent is unemployed, or in casual work, part-time work. The hardship resulting from such poverty, clearly has a great impact on children's happiness and well-being.

‘When you live with one parent, the most important problem is the financial one, because from only one parent ..., only one is working, only one contributes usually, therefore the most important [problem] is the financial [problem]. If, lets say, you do not have a permanent home, if your parent does not have a permanent job, certainly the most important thing is the financial one.’ (Sophie, 16 years old, Cyprus)

‘I’m not very happy as there’s not enough (money) for us.’ (Awale, boy, 12 years, England)

Many single parent children are cognisant of ‘being poor’ and perceive themselves as worse off financially than children who live with two parents. Most single parent children experience their relative poverty, particularly in relation to their peers. In England, this is particularly the case amongst secondary school children. Unlike their peers, children from poorer single parent families usually do not have enough pocket money to spend, do not go on holiday with their parent, and feel deprived in this respect. In Cyprus and in Greece, absolute poverty is evident, with some children describing going hungry, and having to rely on grandparents or their absent father to feed them.

‘...because we do not have enough money to get lunch, we go to my grandmother. My grandfather, who has some money because he works, feeds us and we stay there until the afternoon. When we go out, my mother tells us not to

ask for many things because we do not have much money. And we open her purse and she has very little money: she may have a five-pound note and some shillings.’ (Giagkos, boy, 10 years, Cyprus)

‘There are cases, that is, when we do not manage with shopping at the supermarket, everyday. There are days when I am hungry and I call my father and tell him: “Come, take me and feed me.’ (Lenas, 15 year old boy, Cyprus)

Furthermore, there is evidence of malnutrition in Greece amongst a small number children, and reliance on charitable centres for food, as in the case of V, a boy aged 14 years who lives with his siblings (one of whom is disabled) and his mother and her partner, neither of whom work. They often have nothing to eat and are forced to take recourse to the municipality ‘mess’.

Single parent children often employ specific approaches in an attempt to constrain the effects of poverty. Many children said they were sensitive to their parent’s situation and try not to ask for more money or request things that they cannot afford. Some were able to access additional funds either directly or indirectly in the form of presents, from relatives, especially grandparents. And for older children in England and Cyprus, having a part-time job is a sought-after means to increase personal funds. However, in England, constrained by their poor environments, few said they had been able to find such work because of the lack of part-time jobs available in the areas they live.

Financial worries and concerns also impact on single parent children’s future plans and ambitions. Children from Perama in Greece, feel especially bitter and pessimistic about their future. Only a few dream of studying at the University. They are particularly worried about their future job prospects and view competition from migrant workers as a threat. Their concerns are exacerbated by the fact that they live in an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. They accuse employers of preferring to hire a migrant worker (Albanian mostly), rather than a Greek person. Their attitude towards migrant workers is hostile, whilst they view politicians in a very dismissive way (“they are all worthless”, “nobody does anything”, “only through acquaintances you can get a job”, “they don’t care”). In England older children, despite having a good idea about what they would like their future prospects to be, frequently perceive financial restrictions as likely to prevent them achieving their goals. And in Cyprus

single parent children often feel uncertain about their educational futures because of the high costs of education.

‘My sister wants to go and study Mathematics, to do her GCSEs, but it is a lot of money and my mother does not have that money to pay, so she may have to stop...If it was me I would not allow it, because I know how much she wants to study Mathematics, but it does not depend on me.’ (Cyrus, 14 year old boy, Cyprus)

Many older children in Cyprus and England believe government policy is directly to blame for their family’s financial predicament and often put forward substantive arguments as to why their family’s financial circumstances are unfair, and why their single parent should pay less tax or receive more benefits to compensate for the fact there is only one, not two parents. They argue that government should recognise this disparity and respond accordingly with appropriate policies.

In Greece generally, children’s expectations from the political authorities vary greatly, from better schools, free rent, more playthings, to universal pleas, such as the following: *I would ask the prime-minister for equality, eradication of poverty, and a world without orphans and racism (P., boy aged 11).*

Recommendation: Minimum Income

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the child should underpin all policy-making on child poverty. The financial difficulties faced by many single parent families may lead them below the poverty line with all the associated consequences brought about by social and economic exclusion. Policies should ensure a minimum income for all single parent families according to family size and provide these families with appropriate tax relief to supplement their income.

Recommendation: Divisions in Poor Communities

- Income poverty can lead to divisions between different ethnic groups in some poor communities, with children drawn into the animosity. Politicians need to address income, employment and education policies that build community cohesion in poorer communities, otherwise more divisive policies could lead to cynicism, bigotry and racism at a young age.

2. Debt

Children's understandings of their families' experience of poverty are also directly related to why many of their single parents struggle not to fall into debt. Single parents frequently mentioned the pressure of both actual and looming debt problems. In Cyprus, single parents describe debts arising from their previous family status, adding to the financial pressures that the family is facing. In England, some single parents describe how any unexpected cost such as the heating breaking down and having to pay for repairs, or even the extra cost of a piece of school uniform, can quickly tip the balance from credit to debit. Yet child demands for money and the tears when they are unable to meet basic requests such as money to go swimming with friends, can frequently create the pressure to spend beyond their immediate capacity. Several single parent respondents were currently or had recently been badly in debt. This in turn places great pressure on children. 14 year old Thomas, for example, explained how angry and upset he felt that he could not help his mother who he often found crying because she owed a lot of money and was worried about the bailiffs.

‘I just want to help her whatever way I can, but when it's to do with money, well I'm just broke’.

3. Balancing Work with Care

Single parents find it very difficult to reconcile their family responsibilities with a paid job. Our study shows that older single parent children, particularly girls, often have to play an active role in helping their single parent with childcare of younger siblings because of the problems single parents face in balancing employment and childcare responsibilities single-handedly. Most single parents in all three countries want better job prospects for themselves, but find it very hard to either sustain an income in part-time work or manage the childcare when working longer hours. Affordable childcare provision is still not widely available for pre-school children; moreover, it is often only employed women who have access to childcare particularly for pre-school children, thus increasing the difficulties for unemployed women to look for a job. In Greece there are no childcare services for women working in the afternoon and on Saturdays.

Many older children in England and Greece, especially girls, can experience stress and tiredness as a consequence of carrying the burden of childcare when their parent works. It was noted that in England, the experience of undertaking such a parenting role can lead to some young people developing a more adult persona than their age would suggest.

Informal childcare provided by grandparents plays a central role in enabling some poorer parents to work.

‘If I didn’t have my mum I wouldn’t be able to work. That is the choice. My mum means I can work because I wouldn’t be able to afford the childcare’.
(Female, single parent secondary school children, England)

The life conditions and future plans of single mothers who lack any kind of support from others are much more problematic. One single parent mother in Cyprus said:

‘In my case I don’t have anyone to leave the kids with because my mother is an old woman and she can’t really take care of them; ...Kids are smacking each other and because of this nobody wants to take the responsibility of caring for them, and it is really difficult for me. I don’t have someone I can trust and once when I left the kids because I had to go somewhere, their father immediately made an issue out of it saying that I leave the kids without adequate security.’

Another explained how she has no one to help her financially and in order to pay the rent and provide her children with the basics such as food, clothing, and extra lessons she has three jobs. Frustrated she asks herself:

‘How much longer will a woman endure working so hard, in these kinds of hard jobs . . . the jobs I have are not easy . . . in order to raise my children?’

Recommendation: Family Friendly Employment

- Children want their single parent to earn more and work less. Single parents’ caring responsibilities, inflexible working conditions and the lack of skills and training support, before and after the take up of paid work, are all central causes for the poverty experienced by children in single parent families. Programs which offer single parents opportunities for more skilled full or part-time employment should form the core of policy efforts to support single parent families.

- Policies, however, need to ensure the multiple demands placed upon single parents and the often resulting problem of time poverty are balanced with the benefits accruing from employment.
- More holistic measures are needed dove-tailing together across government departments to address single parent and thereby child poverty.

Recommendation: Childcare

- Investment in affordable, quality state childcare that fits into working hours is vital if single parents are to balance their caring responsibilities with earning an income. Reliance on older children, particularly daughters, places unfair pressure on the whole family. The subsidy of informal childcare provided by relatives would help parents to manage atypical hours.

3. Maintenance

Arrangements with regard to child maintenance vary in the three countries, but when the father refuses to pay, children as well as single parents experience enormous stress. In Cyprus, one of the most serious problems faced by divorced families involves the delays or unwillingness of the absent parent to provide the maintenance for supporting the children. As a result many single parents end up resorting to legal measures or simply giving up. Single parents in Greece receive only a small cash benefit from the welfare services if the child has been abandoned by the father. In England, there is a guaranteed basic income for one parent families, whether the father provides maintenance or not. However, in all three countries, when agreements are set up and the father doesn't pay, children get entangled in the fall-out.

In Cyprus and Greece in particular, both mothers and children often live in financial desperation as a result.

‘Let’s say my father has left my mother and gone. And let’s say he will come and give ten pounds for us to get by, he does not know that we have to buy, milk and such things, let’s say . . . for school there comes a moment when we say to him ‘I want money to go to a birthday party,’ or I will go to the grocer, and he tears himself up because he has to give us money. With ten pounds what can you get? So sometimes you may be embarrassed, let’s say, because it is my village that we go shopping and people know about it. In general, it has been a long time since he has given us money.’ (Leo, 15 years old, Rural, Limassol).

If the single parent does not have a regular, full-time job and a stable income, things can become dramatically more difficult, particularly in Greece and Cyprus. In all countries

the “luckier” ones are usually those who have relatives who are willing to help them financially, either directly with money, or indirectly with presents, meals, etc. In this way, the single parent family ends up being dependent on the goodwill, sensitivity, compassion or pity that the relatives feel for the family.

It is important to note that there are non-resident parents who not only pay the money they are legally obligated to pay for children’s maintenance, but also give their former spouses additional money to meet the children’s extra needs and wishes. This does not necessarily mean however, that the financial problems of single parent families are eliminated, even when the state has taken over the service. The Child Support Agency in England, for example has historically had a very poor record in assessing and collecting child maintenance.

Recommendation: Child Maintenance

- Where maintenance cannot be agreed amicably between parents or speedily through the court system, the economic pressure on single parents and children will be dramatically reduced by a policy which guarantees the monthly maintenance to all single parent families by the state and also makes the state responsible for collecting the maintenance. Similarly, the state should take the responsibility for guaranteeing continued maintenance support for those over 18 (without the child needing to resort to legal measures) provided that he/she is still dependent on the single parent family (e.g. university students, etc).

4. Housing

One of the principal ways in which many children from single parent families in all three countries experience inequality is through their housing. For single parent families who do not own a house, or are left without a house after the transition to single parenthood and as a result end up renting, things are particularly difficult.

Absolute poverty, with respect to housing, is particularly evident in Greece. If they had more money, most of the children interviewed in Greece would in the first instance improve their homes, many of which are very sub-standard, with some households having to manage without electricity, running water and toilet facilities. When families have to flee a violent father, they face even greater problems. There are only two hostels in the whole of Greece, one in Athens and one in Thessaloniki for single parent families in a crisis situation. There are only two hostels in Cyprus supporting victims of

domestic violence, in Nicosia and in Limassol. In contrast, there are many voluntary, public sector and Women's Aid projects across England supporting women escaping from domestic violence.

In Cyprus, the lack of a minimum income especially when families first split up means that in some cases the family is forced to sell the only property it owns (which was intended for the children, for their studies, etc) in order to survive. As a result, the intentions and plans of the family for the future collapse.

Many children in all three countries describe how the lack of space in their homes is a major disadvantage in their upbringing. Children in Greece want a room of their own. This is echoed by poorer children in England, where the high cost of housing means children are very aware of their relative poverty in this respect. Poor home environments mean for example, that some single parent children in England are reluctant to reciprocate with invitations to stay at their own house after sleepovers shared at friends' houses. One teenage boy explained that there is very little room in his house to invite friends round. If he had his own bed he would feel 'normal', but instead he has to share with his brother.

Recommendation: Housing

- Policies need to take into account the housing needs of single parent families and provide such allowances and housing provision which enable single parent families to live in secure, social environments that guarantee the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many single parent families face serious problems with housing including sub-standard provision, the high costs for renting or buying a house, inadequate space in the house and in some cases the lack of basic amenities. Policies which provide for investment in good quality social housing and housing subsidies based on need should be further supported while lower-rate housing loans should be made available to single parent families.
- EU countries with weak hostel and housing infrastructures supporting women escaping domestic violence, should begin to make the link between violence and women's poverty and invest in supportive re-housing programmes

Community

1. Friendships are significantly important for single parent children

Friendships are a very important aspect of the daily lives of single parent children. Friends provide a fundamental source of enjoyment and emotional support; being in their presence creates a sense of well-being and inclusion. Most friendships are localised being either class mates from school or children who live in the same local neighbourhood. Social activities enjoyed by single parent children are generally common across all three countries: visiting friend's homes, playing video games, watching TV, get-togethers in the local neighbourhood, sports activities (swimming, football) and cinema.

Family background does not appear to define single parent children's friendship relations in that they often have friends from both single and two-parent backgrounds. Trust and mutual understanding are more significant friendship ingredients. Some single parent children like Ellie living in England, can be sharing personal and intimate family problems which they do not want widely known and discussed. Other children, for example Leo from Cyprus and Yannis from Greece, said they specifically discuss family issues with those of their friends who have, or had in the past, similar problems because they feel that only these children can really understand them. It can be a source of great angst and upset for single parent children if their trust is broken by supposed friends spreading personal information or saying unpleasant things about them behind their back.

'If you tell your friends about what's going on at home like if you can trust them, you don't want them to tell everyone else what's going on at home.'
(Ellie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural, England)

'I only listen to my best friend now because he is the only one who went through the things that I am experiencing now.'
(Leo, boy, single parent child, 15 years, urban, Cyprus)

'The only person I could talk to about what went on at home with my mother and my sick sister was my best friend from the neighbourhood, whom I met in Kavala when I spent some time there with my grandmother. He was the only one who could understand me.'
(Yannis, boy, single parent child, 14 years, urban, Greece)

2. Single parent children's exclusion from friendships

Many single parent children, especially in Cyprus and England, experience social exclusion through the difficulties they face in developing and maintaining friendships. Poverty appears to have a significant impact on their social relations and their capacity to actively engage with friends. In the long-term, such exclusion from friendship is likely to have serious implications for single parent children's social mobility in adult life.

Despite the value of friendship in their lives, single parent children living in Cyprus and England, although not in Greece, often feel unable to participate in the activities of friends and peers because of constraints imposed by their family's poverty. Teenagers especially, said they often face exclusion from their friends as a consequence of not having the right clothes to wear or enough money to pay to go out with them. Others reported that they do not really go out with their friends, or do not go out as much as they would have wanted, for financial reasons. Instead of socialising they stay at home or in their local neighbourhoods. Aggravating children's sense of exclusion is that their friends often fail to accommodate their needs by agreeing to do an alternative 'free' activity or to go somewhere they can afford. As Katie in England explained, her friends will simply go out without her, or as Minas in Cyprus has experienced, his friends are quite happy to enjoy activities he cannot pay for, even in his presence.

'Sometimes my friends go to the cinema and stuff and I haven't got enough money to go so they just go without me. I can't go so I have to stay at home.'
(Katie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural, England)

'If they (my friends) go to places where you need to pay to enter, I do not go inside. Or if they go to some place to eat, I go with them, they eat and I watch.'
(Minas, boy, single parent child, 16 years, urban, Cyprus)

Single parent children also face problems in maintaining friendships because the combination of their parent's time and financial poverty necessitates them having to help run the household. Many children regularly undertake household chores such as cleaning, tidying up, and cooking and teenagers, especially girls, are sometimes forced to take on adult care responsibilities such as looking after younger siblings. In Cyprus, boys living in rural areas will also support their single parent with gardening and work in the family fields, and older children often help their younger siblings with transport

provision. Consequently, instead of having the time to enjoy playing with friends, many single parent children are often assisting in the family home. Additionally, a few teenage children in Cyprus and England mention having part-time paid jobs to help their personal and family finances, further limiting the time they have available to socialise with friends.

The cost and availability of transport is another negative factor, especially for single parent children living in rural areas, where long distances need to be travelled to meet friends or access any leisure facilities. For example, some children living in rural regions of Cyprus explained that when friends moved to the cities, transport difficulties prevented them staying in contact; and in England, teenagers from rural areas complained about the cost of bus travel needed to access sport and leisure facilities in city centres, frequented by their friends.

In addition, some single parent children mentioned their parent was often unable to afford the cost of school trips or extra curriculum activities, further restricting their capacity to socialise. In this respect, many Cypriot single parent children mentioned out-of-school activities they would like to participate in if they had more money including swimming, martial arts, music or dancing classes. Similarly, in Greece many single parent children wanted to participate in dance or music lessons (girls), or a sports activity (boys). And in England several single parent children explained how unhappy and isolated it made them feel to miss school trips because like, Elizabeth, they not only felt excluded from enjoying the trips with their friends, but also had no one to socialise with at home when their friends were away.

‘The money mum earns isn’t that much amount. So every time we go somewhere like if there’s a school trip at school, most people go there, like school camp, and we can’t afford it and I can’t go.’ (Elizabeth, girl, single parent child, 14 years, rural, England)

3. Lack of accessible community play and leisure activities for single parent children

The social worlds of single parent children are also constrained by restricted opportunities for community play with friends and organised leisure activities. Poverty as experienced through poor home environments means that many children have few

parks or play areas in the immediate vicinity of where they live and few youth and sports clubs. As a consequence, the social worlds of single parent children can be fairly constrained, mainly confined to their home or hanging around playing in the local neighbourhood.

Many single parent children as well as single parents were highly critical of the absence of play and leisure facilities in their local neighbourhoods. If there were such venues they tended to be some considerable distance from where they lived, and the transport and entrance fees were generally judged prohibitive. For example, single parent mothers living in a rural region of Cyprus complained that their children have few places to play locally and the only available leisure facilities such as gymnastics or football classes are in the city, making them too costly and time consuming to access. In England, teenage boys in particular bemoaned the lack of local youth centres and sports clubs, with the result there is very little for them to do with their friends other than hang around the streets. They were also pessimistic that any such facilities would ever get built in their home area.

‘There’s nothing to do round here. A sports centre would be good, swimming pool, football, badminton. But let’s be realistic it ain’t going to happen.’ (Boy, secondary school, single parent child group, urban, England)

Recommendations

- Single parent children’s view of social exclusion having a relational element i.e. exclusion from friendship, needs to be taken into account by policy makers. Local governments need to invest in providing safe, affordable places for children to interact with one another and engage in social activities.
- Strong recommendations come from single parent children for cheap, local leisure facilities (playgrounds, swimming pools, football fields, gymnasiums etc), and youth and community clubs.
- Policies are needed which allow for accessible and subsidised transport so that single parent children, especially those living in rural areas, can access play and leisure facilities.

- The organisation of subsidised local cultural and social events for children, especially in rural areas, would offer opportunities for single parent children to play and socialise and help combat social exclusion.
- Policies are required that help relieve time and financial pressures on single parents, so reducing pressures on single parent children to provide care and support in the home and freeing them to spend more time with friends. In particular, childcare needs to be more accessible and affordable.

School Life

Schools play a key role in children's lives and their role in supporting children from single parent families needs to be enhanced.

In all three countries participating in this program school appears to play a central role in children's lives. In general, elementary school children from single parent families expressed positive attitudes towards school while some secondary school children expressed some negative attitudes with regards to certain aspects of school life (e.g., the perceived unfairness of teachers' behavior management in the UK or their expressed sense of indifference towards school in Greece). What were more common however were examples pointed out by children in all three countries of misunderstandings, insensitive use of language, unintentional and sometimes intentional stigmatization, prejudice, and even discrimination by their peers or teachers. Such incidents resulted in children from single parent families feeling a sense of social exclusion; however, in the majority of cases these incidents did not result from the fact that these children came from single parent families but rather from the fact that they were poor (e.g., instances of bullying in the UK because a child wore the 'wrong' style and brand of clothes and trainers).

'In my class, a comment may escape from some of the children concerning my family, trying to insult my father, my mother, saying that my father had a reason to leave, everyone thinks as they wish, but they stick to their own issues and then look into other people's affairs.' (15 year old boy, Cyprus)

Single parents in the three countries differed in how they perceived the role of school in their children's lives. In the UK, parents were in general satisfied with the role of the school with only a few of them identifying problems of communication between themselves and the school or lack of sensitivity on behalf of the school when meetings are scheduled (given single parents' tight schedules) or when addressing them in letters (e.g., addressing letters to Mr and Mrs). In Greece, many single parents exhibited a sense of indifference towards their children's schooling and a general unwillingness to cooperate with teachers, while in Cyprus many parents felt that the school and teachers in particular do not provide the necessary support to their children and sometimes even stigmatize them.

‘Children from families of a good social standing, where both parents are present, are excused if they present problems. But if my son did this thing, they would punish both me and my son, or even suspend him from school.’ (Single mother, urban, Cyprus)

The inability of single parents (either because of their own educational background as is the case with some parents in Greece or because of time poverty as is the case in all three countries) to adequately assist their children with their homework and to pay attention to their school behavior and achievement is a major problem faced by single parent families in relation to children’s schooling.

‘I feel really, really guilty. I do ask them (about homework), but it’s always a kind of just checking have you done your homework? I don’t have time to sit. My time with the girls is very sparse at the minute as there’s a lot of work on.’ (Female parent, single parent group, secondary school children, rural, UK)

Many parents from the three countries also expressed their frustration at the financial limitations they have as a result of their poverty in sending their children for extra lessons as is the norm for most families.

‘If you can’t afford it you feel terribly guilty. Middle class families with two parents working afford it, they’re all paying for children to have extra tuition so they’ve got an unfair advantage.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban, UK)

Existing support services provided through schools in the three countries play a key role in supporting children from single parent families but their presence needs to be strengthened and their effectiveness enhanced. Children in the UK were very positive about the role of special learning units, tutor groups, learning mentors which they considered to be highly effective in helping and supporting them.

‘My learning tutor he knows most of my problems. He understands me and listens to me. If I tell him something he just keeps it to himself and tries to find a way to help me out.’ (Ali, boy, single parent child, 13 years, urban, UK)

Children in Cyprus were similarly very favorable about the support they received from their teachers though the lack of institutionalized support involving teachers means that it is left up to the goodwill of each individual teacher to provide such help. The situation in Greece was very similar to that of Cyprus; counseling services were provided through school but were inadequate and with a quite delayed response.

Teachers took it upon themselves to provide such support, something for which they, however, felt inadequately trained. Another related problem, most intensely identified in the case of Cyprus, is that children were quite suspicious and prejudiced against psychological support provided through the school and unwilling to access such help especially because of lack of trust in the effectiveness of such support and the fear of stigmatization.

Policy Recommendations

- There is a need for more coordination of support services provided to children through school in order to increase the effectiveness of such support.
- Educational policy should aim to establish adequate counseling services in schools in order to provide children with free and accessible counseling services when they need them. It is also important that such services are provided in discreet ways that avoid stigmatizing children. At the same time, it is imperative to educate children about the normality of seeking counseling and other psychological support when they need it.
- The role of teachers in supporting children from single parent families needs to be further enhanced and supported by institutional structures and provisions (e.g., training, work load reductions, etc) as children find this kind of support very important.
- Educational policies should take into account the particularities and limitations of single parents and devise mechanisms that support the role of parents in their children's schooling and to facilitate the communication between teachers and parents.
- States should provide subsidies and other allowances to cover the increasingly high costs of extra lessons for poor, single parent families.

Teachers need to be properly trained to be able to help and support children from single parent families

In general teachers in the three countries did not single out children from single parent families as being distinct from other groups of children. Most teachers also did not identify direct correlations between the school performance of these children and their family status. However, many teachers indirectly alluded to family type and circumstances as playing a role in children's school performance. Where children exhibited low academic achievement or behavioral problems in school, teachers assumed that the root cause of these problems was the family situation of these children. One of the assumptions for instance made by some UK teachers is that children from single parent families often live in chaotic environments and that they suffer from a lack of appropriate male role models. Teachers in Cyprus often assumed that the behavioral problems that children from single parent families exhibit in school are linked to a process of divorce or separation that the family is undergoing and the lack of attention paid to the child by the single parent. In Greece some teachers were also inclined to attribute learning difficulties that children faced to their single parent family status rather than to a more complex combination of factors such as poverty, lack of support, or the low educational level of parents.

Many teachers from the three countries also felt that they lacked the knowledge and training to address issues related to single parent families and family diversity in general without labeling or stigmatizing children in their classrooms. As a result, they often avoided addressing such issues with their students.

Policy Recommendations

- Teacher training needs to incorporate training on family diversity with a particular emphasis on single parent families given the widespread presence of this social phenomenon.
- Teachers need to be trained on issues related to emotional intelligence and in providing basic academic and emotional support to their students, not as alternatives to other kinds of support (e.g., professional psychological support) but as part of the educational support that they can provide to their students. At the same time teachers should be trained in providing basic emotional support to students, they should also be trained in ethics and be sensitized to issues of

privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality all of which are of significance to children as revealed through this study.

- Teacher training needs to incorporate training on issues related to poverty and social exclusion and how these relate to different family types including single parent families as well as to children's academic performance. Furthermore, teacher training needs to incorporate training on the diverse forms of single parent families, the role of the extended family and of friends in children's lives, the impact of time poverty on single parent families and children in particular, as well as on issues of institutional discrimination.

School Curricula Need to Reflect the Social Realities of Contemporary Family Forms in General and of Single Parent Families in Particular

School curricula in the three countries do not adequately reflect the social realities of family diversity in the contemporary world. Though there are significant differences of degree in the extent to which the curricula of each country reflect such realities—with the UK being significantly ahead in this respect when compared to either Greece or Cyprus—the overall picture which emerges is one of inadequate coverage of family diversity in general and of single parent families in particular. As a result, single parent families as well as other types of family run the risk of standing out as abnormal family types or at least as exceptional when in fact they constitute part of a continuum of family types and circumstances. This inadequate coverage of family diversity in official curricula leaves teachers with very limited resources to raise such issues in the classroom.

Policy Recommendations

- School curricula (e.g., teachers' guides, textbooks, etc) need to be revised in such a way as to reflect the contemporary social realities of family diversity. At the same time, school curricula need to take into account various other parameters of family diversity that provide for an informed understanding of family diversity without the risk of stereotyping different family types. With regards to single parent families, school curricula need to address, among others, the diverse types of single parent families, the role of the extended family and of friends, the role of poverty and social exclusion in single parent families, and the impact of time poverty.
- Educational materials which support the role that trained teachers may play in addressing issues of family diversity should be produced and incorporated in mainstream curricula.
- To provide teachers with the relevant support, emotional intelligence should be integrated in school curricula and appropriate materials produced as tools for teachers to use when providing emotional support to children.

School Textbooks

General

School textbooks as well as other curriculum content do not simply teach knowledge and skills but also influence students' perceptions of the social world, in this case perceptions of family, gender roles and perceptions of and attitudes towards what is and what is not a family structure.

Greece and Cyprus have textbooks which are used in all schools and could be analyzed, while English schools have a choice of books. In this last case it was possible to get what teachers usually use or recommend, so these books were studied. Comparisons cannot be made on all subjects, as Greek and Cypriot analyses focused on all books used, while English analysis in the case particularly of secondary school books, focused on what teachers recommended. Their recommendations, however, were combined with the other analyses.

The common finding in the books usually used, especially for primary school level, was that practically no single parent families are represented in the texts, except where a parent has died or is away working. Traditional families are depicted, especially in the reading books. Changes are presented, so far as family member roles are concerned in a few cases.

In secondary education books there is more diversity. The standard reading books and history books for Greece and Cyprus do not present single parent families, except where a parent has died, but modern citizenship curriculum and health education books invite students to discuss variations of family structures. English books that the teachers recommended do include personal, social and health education books, where single parent families and their circumstances are described.

Gender roles in the family as represented in primary school books

The Greek analysis finds that language books of primary schools (Η Γλώσσα μου, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, editions 2002-2004), though including more positive images for girls than previously used reading books, are still representing women in the traditional roles and stereotypes, giving distorted and unrealistic representation as a whole. The Greek analysers find that textbooks in general give more

representations of men than women, devaluing women's activities. Fathers are represented as breadwinners and protectors of the family, are often engaged in professions in the public sphere, while women are engaged in domestic activities in the private sphere, loving and supporting their children. Girls are depicted cleaning and cooking, fathers are not. However, it is pointed out, new reading books have just come out, with changing gender representations.

Other books concerned with social subjects do discuss families, gender roles, discuss who does and who does not do household chores in the house; for instance at a point the father washes dishes when his wife is very busy outside the home with her job. Rights of the children are also given a chapter, for instance children have the right to be loved and protected by their parents.

The Cypriot analysis focused on various books, some of which, mainly the reading books, are the same with the Greek books. Gender roles are presented also as traditional, starting with the loving family blessed by God in religious books, the sanctified mother in a reading book, with lots of love and support expressed among the members. There are, however cases of modern gender relationships, where parents both educate the children answering their queries and giving them information about the world, at times both parents playing with them or even with the father helping in the kitchen or cooking. Mathematics books are even more traditional in the Cypriot analysis with the mother continuously in the kitchen, while the father is often outside on business.

In the reading books English primary schools use there are cases of ethnic minority families, and there are cases where, for instance, the female is working as a doctor and the male does housework. In other cases the characters are given no gender.

Secondary school books on gender roles

The Cypriot and English teams separated some characteristics in the secondary school books. In the Cypriot analysis the value of the family as an institution is stressed, the members support one another and offer affection, safety, stability, acceptance and reassurance. In the Cypriot analysis the traditional family continues in the reading books, with different behaviour for mothers and for fathers. The family is also named as

the “social cell for the development and wellbeing of all its members”, “free from violence and neglect” in Home Economics books.

But in other places fathers also appear affectionate. The supportive role of parents and grandparents is emphasized.

Citizenship Education books invite discussion on changes of the institution of family through the ages, refer to stereotypes and prejudices passed through the institution itself, and also discuss neglect and abandonment.

In secondary English school books analysis gives some reference to violence in the family, with particular reference to single parent families in secondary school books.

The single parent family in primary school books

Single parent families are not represented in reading books used in primary schools of Greece or Cyprus, excepting families where a parent has died or is away working. They are not represented in reading books used in English schools either, although English books show family diversity as black families, ethnic minority families, differences in gender roles and expectation and differing sizes of families.

The Greek analysis shows a two-parent Greek family with typically two children, sometimes with a grandparent present. A grandparent takes over the parenting duties with one or both parents being out of the country working. The mother cares for the children when the father is a sea-man working or is dead. A single parent family (mother has died) is recomposed with a step mother being brought in and things are going to be happy, from what is said in the text. One representation gives a discussion of various structures of family including single parent families. There is one representation of conflict in the family.

The Cypriot analysis also reveals a two parent family with two children (rarely three). When one parent is missing, this is a result of death (natural or due to killing during a recent war), or to absence for work abroad. The bond still holds strong in these cases, as sadness is expressed by the other members of the family, and joy for the father’s return.

Although there is no representation of single parent families due to separation, divorce or no marriage, there are two cases of serious conflict in the family.

Representations of social and economic difficulties are given in books of citizenship curriculum and mention of single parent families, in a way as the teacher's guide prescribes, as children involved "do not feel uncomfortable or disadvantaged" Acquiring a new mother is represented in a reading book and things seem to be looking as a successful change. New mothers are alluded to when an animal is brought up by an animal other than the real mother or a bird is hatched and supported by another couple of birds.

Economic hardships are rarely discussed. Violent incidents are alluded to in cases where fathers attend their children's actions. For example, when a child is about to kill a worm, the father attempts to make the child think about before to proceed. Full discussions around the issue evolve in Citizenship books.

Single parent family in secondary school books

Cypriot analysis gives no representations of single parent families in reading books except when separated by death or work outside the country. In cases of death the mother or father, a grandparent and more rarely sons, take over the responsibility of raising the children. Economic or social difficulties are rarely mentioned, but there are two quite dramatic expositions of abandonment and despair. In another case a mother brings up her children alone and has difficulties such as many hours of work and little time to devote to her children, a rare case of reference to everyday difficulties of a single mother apart from the emotions.

Citizenship books present, discuss and invite participation of students on all kinds of family structure.

English analysis of secondary school books cannot be compared with the Cypriot one, as it focuses on books that teachers approached by the team recommended for presentations of the theme of single parent families. In the programme of personal, social and health education two particular books are described for the direct, yet sensitive coverage of single parent family issues. The first describes the life of a brother

and sister and their mother who left the father after he became physically abusive. They move to London, where they try to find a new home and face a variety of family crises. The second focuses on the life of four girls who live in a poor estate with their pregnant mother. One more book describes a young man who hated his step father and ran away from home, becoming homeless in London, so inviting a lot of discussion on stepparents and the interaction with them. And a fourth book describes the life of a boy with his single parent father, exploring relationships with the father and interrelation with and feelings about the absent mother.

Conclusion and recommendations

a). Primary school books

It becomes evident that primary school books in the three countries have rare, if any, reference to single parent families, except due to death or work abroad. Moreover the gender roles in the family remain basically traditional. The statistics of single parent families in modern society, the new roles of women and men in modern families, are not represented. Discussions are made in citizenship- health education curricula in all three countries.

Recommendations: Generally school curricula should provide present time perception of gender roles and family structures. Recommendations are here made towards including the new realities and needs of modern society and single parent families after separation, divorce or no marriage, and assisting socialization in the present social situation. In this way children from single parent families and from families with new needs will be more at home and better accepted by themselves and their peers and women will expect more of themselves.

b). Secondary school books

In secondary school books a similar absence of reference to these new realities is observed. Books on citizenship and social and health education touch on the subjects, or, as in the case of English books directly describe such circumstances, but it is doubtful if these cover enough ground in changing the picture and the attitudes needed to face the statistically evident change in family structures and roles. Nor are women made more able to expect of themselves an equal footing in society in general and education in particular.

Recommendations: Secondary school curricula should provide students with realistic perceptions of gender roles and family structures. Recommendations are made towards including in widely used books (reading books, social subjects etc) the new roles and changing family structures. The aim should be to influence children towards an equal women- men social role, and children from single parent families to be more at home, more accepted by themselves and their peers and more able to cope with issues that are related to the changes observed.

School Practices and Procedures

No official knowledge of family status

The research in all three countries showed that schools do not keep data in school records, or other such official documents, on whether a child is from a single or two-parent family. The teachers interviewed said they are often completely unaware a child is from a single parent family. *'I have to admit I'm not even aware which students are from single parents and which aren't and so from that point of view it's not even a factor in what I'm looking at.'* (Female, secondary school teacher, urban, U.K.).

Sometimes in smaller schools, however, teachers are able to identify which children come from SPFs in their own class.

'There are some of the children that come and speak to me that we know are from single parents that do come and talk to me, but I wouldn't be able to discriminate between the two...but obviously I would know the children in my class.' (Female, primary school teacher, urban, U.K.).

It is not thought necessary to know which children are from single parent families since single parenthood is only one of many different variants of family background represented in their schools. Furthermore, single parent children are not considered a minority group. Teachers believe there are large numbers of single parent children in their schools, even if they do not know the precise number.

'It is very common these days to come from a single parent family. There are definitely a lot of children whose parents are divorced or separated among our students' (Female, primary school head mistress, inner city Athens, Greece).

Definitions of single parent family

There are no specific definitions of single parenthood in use in any of the researched schools in all three countries. Teachers, some of whom are single parents themselves, tend to have very different personal definitions based around the family situations of single parent children they know in their school, including children growing up not knowing one parent, children who have a parent that has died, children spending the

majority of their time with only one parent, and children living with one parent all the time. Furthermore, many teachers consider a precise definition difficult or even impossible since they are aware of so many different examples of single parent families.

'I wouldn't have a definition because I can think of so many different examples. Thinking of the ones in my year group I couldn't give a definition because it's so diverse.' (Female, secondary school teacher, urban, UK)

In England, teachers claim the term 'single parent' is a misnomer since they can think of examples in their school where parental care of a child is split between two parents living separately in two homes. Therefore they feel the literal definition of there being only one parent does not hold true. *'Some of the families in our school still have a lot of contact with the other parent and they split the care and that sort of thing. It's not a single parent completely alone always.'* (Female, secondary school teacher, urban U.K.)

Focus on the child as an individual not its parental background

There are no specific policies, practices or official directives on how teachers should relate to single parent children in use at any of the participating schools. Neither does any school provide training for teachers and school staff on how to work with children from single parent families, or provide specific programmes that target children from single parent families. The teachers interviewed in England are consistently of the opinion this is beneficial since single parent children are not being labelled or discriminated against in any way and believe that each child should be treated as an individual, recognising their particular personal needs and working towards meeting those.

'Assumptions aren't made, "you're from a single parent family so that must mean that." Those assumptions aren't made and people aren't judged on the basis of their parents, they are judged as people in the classroom and who they are.' (Female, secondary school teacher, urban, U.K.).

The teachers interviewed in Greece and Cyprus, whilst subscribing to this general view, do however feel that it would be beneficial if they received some training on how to deal with issues such as single parenthood, as they sometimes do not feel equipped to

deal with sensitive emotional issues, such as family break up. *'We simply do not have appropriate training in psychology in order to help in the better adjustment of children who come from family backgrounds with problems'* (teacher, secondary school, Athens)

In all three countries, only in circumstances where a child is experiencing difficulties with their behaviour or education is it thought beneficial to know more detail about the child's specific family background and circumstances, to enable the school to more effectively help the child. As a school counsellor in Cyprus pointed out, all children are treated the same when it comes to disciplinary matters but for educational matters, teachers tend to be more flexible and lenient: *'When a child has limited academic performance, [teachers] will help . . . when s/he is in danger of failing'*.

Views regarding the concept of a 'best practice guide' for teaching children from single parent families

In England, the majority of teachers are strongly antipathetic to the idea of a 'best practice guide' being used to help teach children from single parent families since it conflicts with a core facet of their school's philosophy, to treat each child as an individual. Most teachers feel such a guide would lead to assumptions being made about single parent children's educational ability and behaviour, resulting in labelling and discrimination. They also think it might be too generic to provide effective solutions.

'I think some people could be very upset by that and that could be classified as labelling. As far as behaviour and educational progress in schools is concerned, I think we just need to treat every person as an individual and not say you are like this because you come from a single parent family.' (Female, secondary school teacher, rural, U.K.).

In Greece, however, most teachers felt that although it would be too limited to have a best practice guide specifically on children from single parent families, it would still be useful to have access to some sort of resources and/or training on how to handle sensitive family issues in class (see aforementioned).

Good practice in educational and behavioural support for children (including from single parent families)

The research in England elicited a range of good practice examples of educational and behavioural support for any child, whether from a single parent family or not. A common characteristic of the good practice is an emphasis on inclusion and achievement, with strong efforts being made to motivate and to keep a child within the school rather than have them excluded. These practices include: Internal support centres, Learning facilitators, Learning mentors, Circle Time and Golden Time, Peer support, Connexions personal advisers , Positive comment books, Achievement and incentive schemes

None of these practices exist in either Greece or Cyprus. In Cyprus, schools run an official referral system for children who teachers identify as in need of educational, emotional, or psychological support. Teachers report the issue to the principal who, with the consent of the parents (both parents if possible even in the case of children who come from single parent families) contacts the Department of Educational Psychology of the Ministry of Education and Culture who then reviews the case and decides whether to send an educational psychologist to see the child. This process is rather long and bureaucratic and it is not uncommon to take several months from the time of the initial request to the first visit of the educational psychologist to the school. In secondary schools, school counsellors provide psychological support and counselling to children and in some cases to parents and intervene when necessary to help them deal with academic problems they face. In Greece, no such formal referral practices exist, nor are schools staffed with educational psychologists or social workers who would be able to address such issues, a lack felt intensely by virtually all professionals interviewed. A mentoring system is operated, among other services, by the Family and Childcare Centre (FCC – KMOII) in the deprived area of Perama, offering emotional and educational support to the children who use its services.

Policy Recommendations

- Only when children from SPFs experience difficulties with their behaviour or education is it thought beneficial to know more details about the child's specific family background and circumstances, to enable the school to more effectively help the child.

- Children from SPFs should be treated as individuals and not be labelled in any official or unofficial way. However, based on the expressed views of teachers in Greece and Cyprus, the provision of training on how to best deal with issues concerning single parenthood and family life in single parent families is recommended.
- Although a teachers' guide specifically focused on SPFs is considered either inappropriate (as was the case with the teachers interviewed in England) or far too limited thematically (as was the case with the teachers interviewed in Greece and Cyprus), teachers, especially in Greece and Cyprus, where public debate on SPFs is relatively limited, would welcome a guide on family diversity issues, providing instructions on how to best educate children on the diversity of contemporary forms of family life.
- The range of good practices of educational and behavioural support practiced by the schools researched in England should be used as examples for the Greek and Cypriot school procedures and practices, which should use inclusion and achievement as general themes in their provision of support for children experiencing difficulties. Additionally, Greece should institute services of educational and emotional/behavioural support and formal referral procedures to those for children experiencing particular difficulties.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This project addresses social exclusion and poverty as it relates to single parent families and their children in particular. The rising numbers of single parent families and children throughout the EU and the increased likelihood that these families will live in poverty and experience many different forms of social exclusion in their daily lives brings in sharp focus the need to address the issue as an urgent one in our efforts to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. Our focus on the children of single parent families seeks to rectify a long-standing problem in our knowledge and understanding of single parent families and the social problems they face, namely, the fact that we know little, if anything, about how these children experience and understand their lives as members of these families. Our ultimate aim is to contribute to policy development and the transnational exchange of best practice by adding a much-neglected dimension on single parent families.

The children of single parent families are a particularly vulnerable group which suffers poverty and social exclusion disproportionately (Ridge 2002). Discrimination and stigmatization continue to be significant problems faced by these children on a daily basis because of their particular social status as members of single parent families (which are often seen as a social problem or a social threat) and their often poor living conditions. Much of the research work so far has focused on understanding the disadvantaged trajectories of these children. Though that is an important dimension of the issue, our efforts should also be directed towards incorporating children's own understandings and points of view in the production of knowledge about single parent families. The voices of children from single parent families are rarely if ever included in policy debates. It is important to focus on the lived experiences of children and their families so that the policies formulated, the laws established, and the programmes designed and carried out will have relevance to these children's real needs. Investigating how these children understand and experience their worlds can inform policy making so that interventions will be effective and ultimately improve the lives of these children and their families in the most appropriate and culturally-sensitive manner.

The findings presented in this report aim to inform policy making in different areas of interest such as employment, education, and social welfare. The findings are likely to be useful to a range of professionals working with children from single parent families (e.g., teachers, social workers, psychologists, school councillors, etc) to improve the

services and programs they provide to them in an informed way which includes the perspectives and preferences of the children as direct beneficiaries and thus increases the likelihood that their interventions will be effective and successful.

The specific objectives which have guided this program are :

1. To investigate, through research, to what extent and how the children of single parent families experience, understand, and cope with social exclusion and poverty in their daily lives. This will be achieved through an investigation of their own perspectives and those of their parents as well as those of others with whom they come in contact in their daily lives (e.g., their peers and their parents who belong to two-parent families, teachers, school-councillors, psychologists, social workers, etc).
2. To describe cross-national similarities and differences in children's living in single parents families, experiences and understandings of poverty and social exclusion.
3. To investigate how education, in interaction with community, health and social services facilitates the inclusion or exclusion of children who come from single parent families through their procedures and practices. Given the key role that school plays in the daily lives of children, we have analyzed school curricula (including textbooks) to identify how the notion of family is treated and we provide recommendations for changes where the need for these has been identified.
4. To review the current policies and legislation on the family and as it relates to single parent families at the national level and to make recommendations for changes and for the development of new policies and legislation where necessary.
5. To disseminate the findings of the research study to all those directly involved in the lives of single parent families and to society-at-large with the aim of sensitizing them and combating social exclusion while at the same time developing suggestions for policy and practice changes.
6. To disseminate the project's findings transnationally at the European level through joint, comparative work and by learning from best practices and the sharing of methodologies.

Methodological Approach

The project used a cross-national comparative qualitative research design and methods (Mangen 1999) which involved all partners in the design of each research phase including the analysis. The key questions which guided our research are as follows:

1. How do the children of single parent families experience and understand their daily lives as members of these families. More specifically, how do they understand, experience, and cope with poverty and the multiple forms of social exclusion they face including stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion from certain kinds of social relations and contexts?
2. How do these children perceive the current support and services available to them as they relate to family (including the immediate and extended family), peers, school, community, health and social services, what resources do they draw on for support, and what kinds of support (both formal and informal) do they wish they had?
3. How do other groups in society which come into direct contact with these children (e.g., their peers and their parents, their teachers and other school-related professionals, and community, health, and social service providers view them and their families?

Our sample included children (from both single parent and two parent families) ages 6 to 16 balanced in terms of age, gender, class, ethnicity and geographical location (including urban and rural). Our sample of children from single parent families included all major subcategories of this group, namely, children from divorced, separated, unmarried, and widowed families. More specifically, in each of the three countries we conducted a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the following:

1. Children of single parent families (40 in-depth interviews and 4 focus groups):
2. Single parents: (4 focus groups)
3. Children of two parent families (4 focus groups):
4. Parents of two parent families (4 focus groups)
5. Teachers and other school-related professionals, e.g., school councilors, psychologists, social workers, etc, (4 focus groups with teachers and 10 in-depth interviews with professionals).

A second major area of research investigation comprised the educational system, and how this interacts with community, health and social services in facilitating the social inclusion of single parent families or alternatively their exclusion from society. Of particular interest to the project is the role and interlinkages between these various institutional contexts which influence the well-being of single parent families can reveal

much about the larger structural realities in which single parent families experience their daily lives.

The school is a privileged context for imparting knowledge, values, and attitudes about family and it therefore is a major institutional focus for the project. Apart from investigating the views of teachers about single parent families, we also investigated using qualitative content analysis the existing curriculum to identify how the notion of family is treated and provide recommendations for changes. A central focus of our investigation and analysis was how certain curricular discourses might be used in ways that facilitate the social exclusion of single parent families and of children in particular. Moreover, our investigation focused on school practices and procedures which result in the social exclusion and stigmatization of children from single parent families who live in poverty (e.g., stigmatization as a result of the free services these children might be provided with at school such as free school meals, etc) (Ridge 2002). School practices and procedures were investigated through on-site visits and observation (in addition to the use of interviews with professionals) and recommendations for changes are suggested.

All interviews and focus group discussions were tape recorded (with a few exceptions), transcribed, coded and analyzed. Analysis focused on the major areas of investigation outlined above with a special sensitivity to the emerging themes and the particularities of each national context.

The choice of qualitative over quantitative methods is directly related to our stated goals in this research project and the suitability of a more open and less structured approach, namely a qualitative approach, to understanding children's experiences and the social and cultural processes which underpin poverty and social exclusion. While quantitative research often seeks to test hypothesis and to measure social facts in a deductive manner, qualitative research focuses on understanding the social and cultural meanings of people's behavior, through an in-depth investigation that is mainly inductive or from the ground up. In this sense, qualitative research aims to investigate the underlying social processes which operate rather than map out social structures. Despite the limitations of qualitative research in terms of representativeness and generalizability, qualitative research provides researchers with data that allow them to answer questions like how and why and to understand the complexity of the issues investigated (Neuman

2000). The use of a qualitative methodology for this project was decided precisely because the key issue to be investigated—how children from single parent families understand their lives and how their voices can inform policy-making—required that children (and other groups which are significant in their lives) be provided with an opportunity to express their own understandings and opinions in detail.

By using a qualitative, cross-national and comparative approach (Hantrais and Mangen 1996) the project aims to describe through comparison both similarities and differences between the participating countries and it, therefore, seeks to add to our understanding of the impact of poverty and social exclusion on a European level. For instance, in investigating the extent and nature of social exclusion on children from single parent families across different European countries we can begin to shed some light on the role played by different policy contexts and different family demographics.

Most comparative social research to date focuses on providing quantitative rather than qualitative indicators across certain countries. Qualitative studies which compare evidence across different countries and still rare. One reason is that qualitative methodologies are only now beginning to be accepted in the wider scientific community as useful and valid approaches to understanding social life. Many developments in the area of qualitative research and the refinement of these methods in recent years have contributed immensely to the more mature understanding of the role that qualitative methodologies can play in social science.

A qualitative, cross-national and comparative approach presents researchers with many challenges. One of the major problems of comparative research is comparability. Can you compare, for example, the lives of children from single parent families in Cyprus with those in the UK? What is comparable, what is not? And how useful is such an exercise? The question of conceptual equivalence is a key one here (e.g., What does social exclusion and poverty mean in different countries?) as is the problem of actually carrying out a project in a comparable manner so that what one team does is comparable to what another one does. The question of language and translation is another problem. How do you bring together different cultural concepts through translation under a common language in order to serve the interests of comparison and reporting. Moreover, are you really comparing national differences by choosing particular contexts to carry out qualitative research or are you comparing internal, to each country, differences due to the specificities of these local contexts. Put another way, how

national is the local context (the village, the community, or the town) one selects given that qualitative research is more about context and depth rather than representativeness? Last but not least, in a cross-national comparative qualitative study one ends up moving towards structuring early on (unless you have unlimited funds) interview guides to ensure as much comparability as possible (Hantrais and Mangen 1996), something which prevents a more open and grounded approach that would allow the gradual emergence of themes.

The researchers who worked on this project are well aware of the challenges faced by this kind of comparative work and have tried to address the limitations and challenges posed in creative and productive ways. For instance, the researchers spend considerable time discussing issues of conceptual equivalence and where necessary the note in their analysis divergences of meaning, they have been in constant dialogue to ensure comparability of approaches and they have build into their interview and focus group guides ample flexibility to allow for more open, unstructured discussions.

The benefits from adopting a qualitative, cross-national, comparative methodology far outweigh its limitations providing new insights that are not possible in single country investigations. Given the important cross-national differences in terms of the number of children living in single parent families and in their risk of poverty and social exclusion our transnational partnership allows us to look locally but think comparatively and benefit from the exchange of knowledge and best practice at a European level. It is this comparative character of research which allows us to do valuable, contextually relevant work and produce understandings that are culturally sensitive, yet at the same time, benefit from being juxtaposed to one another. Poverty and social exclusion may manifest themselves locally but they extend beyond the boundaries of states and are impacted by larger, global forces. A comparative approach brings in sharp focus the role played by different policy contexts and different family demographics which differ quite a bit across Europe. By comparing both similarities and differences between the participating countries researchers can begin to see the larger structural patterns which exist, and to overcome the shortsightedness that sometimes plagues an overdependence on the local.

Ethical considerations have underscored all phases of the design and implementation of this project. Permissions were sought and received for entry into all schools. For all

children who participated in the study parental consent was requested from all parents. In the overwhelming majority of cases written consent was provided by parents while oral consent was deemed sufficient in a few cases to allow for cultural differences and local customs regarding the granting of permission from parents about children's participation in research. The consent, written or oral, of all children who participated in the study irrespective of whether their parents consented was also requested to ensure that all children who participated did so voluntarily and not as a result of parental pressure. As Jones and Tannock (2000, p.91) point out, it is very important in research with children to avoid overlooking children's consent because either the parents or some institutional authority has already granted permission.

This project viewed ethics as being over and above any legal requirements and all research teams strove to maintain high ethical standards through the project (Masson 2000, p. 40). It was imperative and a fundamental requirement of our methodological approach to ensure informed consent by all participants in the project. This meant that all those who participated were fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project, the procedures to be followed and their rights as participants, and the ways by which research results would be utilized.

However, since the project focused primarily on children as research participants, special considerations were taken into account. One of our key considerations was to explain to children in a comprehensible manner what the research is about and gain informed consent from them only after we made sure that they really understood what is involved (see Scott 2000, p.114). One of the basic assumptions is that children are competent to provide informed consent provided researchers take all necessary steps to make it comprehensible to them, that is, use the appropriate kind of language and vocabulary and any other means which can aid comprehension.

Consent forms provided potential research participants with information on the general aims of the research and explained how the project would ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all research participants. In other words, consent forms explained that no real names would be used in any of the reports or publications arising from the project and that though the interviews would be recorded for purposes of analysis all data would be kept confidential. All research participants were also informed that they could request that the research findings would be communicated to them with the end of

the project. Children, given their non-adult status, were informed that as the law requires, if during the interview they disclosed any information which suggested that they or another person is at risk of harm, it might be necessary to share this information with an adult who can help, but that this would be done only after a discussion with the child as to how and with whom the information would be shared. Finally children were also informed that they can withdraw from the interview at any point they wish without any negative consequences. When parental consent was requested, parents were also informed that they could request the transcript of the interview if they wished to have it.

To ensure informed consent all children were provided with leaflets which explained the research, its aims, the procedures to be followed and the participant's rights as well as issues related to anonymity and confidentiality. For older children (ages 11-16) a leaflet including the information outlined above was provided while for younger children (ages 6-11) a more developmentally appropriate set of materials was prepared to ensure adequate comprehension. Three different handouts were prepared for younger children. The first one titled "Can you help us with our project?" was given to children before the interview date in order to adequately inform them about the project and to help them think as to whether they wanted to participate in it or not. The handout described what the project is about, who the researchers are and what they want from the children, what the researchers would do with the information collected, and what the child has to do if he or she is interested in participating (i.e., letting their parent(s) know). Two versions (one for the child, the other for the researcher) of another handout were also prepared and used by the researcher and the child before the interview to ensure that the child fully understood what was about to happen. This handout included information that once again allowed children to reach informed consent but also allowed the researcher to clarify any questions which the child might have before beginning the interview. A final handout which was given to the children at the end of the interview informed them about the steps that would follow until the completion of the project and how the results would be utilized. Children were also informed that the results would be provided to them through a number of events that the project planned to organize.

Finally, to ensure that all research participants would feel comfortable through the interview process researchers were adequately sensitized to the particularities of doing research with children. For instance, researchers were instructed to be responsive when interviewing children to non-verbal signs which suggest that the child may be feeling

uncomfortable and may want to terminate the interview. Similarly, researchers were instructed to provide breaks during the interviewing process if children appeared to be tired.

Family Change in Europe

Understanding and comparing whether and how children in single parent families experience poverty and social exclusion, requires an appreciation of the dramatic process of family change that has been characterising European societies since the 1960s. This is because a common outcome of this change has been an increase in the number of children living in lone parent families, and yet what constitutes a lone parent family and what it means to live in one can change dramatically according to where you live.

Family change is associated with two mutually reinforcing processes of demographic change. The first, which began in the late 19th century, saw a decline in fertility, mortality and increase in life expectancy. The second, which began in the 1960s and continues today, is characterised by a decrease in marriage and an increase in cohabitation, extra-marital births, divorce, lone parenthood and reconstituted families (Hantrais, 2004). The process of family change across the EU25 is best captured by Boh's (1989) definition as a 'convergence to divergence'. In other words the diversification of family is common to all countries, and similar trends can be identified across the EU25, but the scope and diversity of change is such that it is not possible to speak of convergence to a set of family forms. This is partly because the starting point, pace and extent of family change vary. Moreover similar trends are being modified by diverse national contexts, their specific historical patterns of family structure, and socio-economic and cultural features (Daly, 2005).

In what follows we compare two main outcomes of family change in Europe, and more specifically in Cyprus, Greece and England¹, on which this study is based. These are the shrinking of the household, and the diversification and de-institutionalisation of family forms. Although the significance of the family is universal, its meaning is not, varying across time and space. This renders reliable comparison of family change across countries very problematic (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996). Many attempts have been made over the years to develop definitions that can incorporate such diversity of meaning, whilst at the same time enable standardisations. Still harmonised definitions are not always adopted in their entirety, and countries also differ in their timing and methods of data collection. Extreme caution needs to be used when relying on

¹ Most of the data refers to the UK, so we will be using that term.

harmonised data sets for comparison and whenever possible should be deconstructed by examining national data and definitions (Hantrail, 2004²).

The household is shrinking

One of the emerging outcomes across the E25 countries is the shrinking of the household. This process began with a shift from extended to nuclear family structure as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation, although historical studies have shown that this shift was by no means universal (Laslett and Wall, 1972). Multi-generational living is quite complex today. On the one hand 3 generations living together is far less common, particularly in the Northern European countries. On the other, the age at which young adults marry and/or leave their parents home has risen significantly, albeit important national differences remain. In 2000 the UK and France showed the earliest age of 19, Cyprus a medium range, whilst Greece and Italy had the highest age at 31 for men (European Commission, 2002). In line with the individualisation of the life course and increased life expectancy, the number of one-person households has risen dramatically (Daly, 2005). In 1960 there were 13 million people across the EU15 living in this type of household, in 1995 there were 42 million, and EUROSTAT predicts that by 2025 there will be 71 million people making up 40% of all households. Once again a North-South divide is visible, with the number of one person households much more common now and in the future in the Northern Countries (EUROSTAT, 2003). The little data available for the countries that joined in 2004, indicate that this type of household was less common in Cyprus and Malta, than in Hungary, Estonia and Slovakia (Hantrais, 2004). The shrinking of the household is associated with a strong trend in the fall of fertility, with a fall from 1.88 to 1.50 between 1980 and 2004 in the EU25 (EUROSTAT 2004). The large fall in the Southern European countries, with Greece showing a fertility rate of 1.29, is also mirrored by the fall experienced by the new member countries. The Northern countries show a higher than average rate, with the UK at 1.74 in 2004, whilst Cyprus is in line with EU rate (EUROSTAT 2004).

² See Hantrais 2004 for a comprehensive account of standardised definitions for the EU25.

Diversification and de-institutionalisation of family forms

The process of family de-institutionalisation is particularly key to understanding lone parenthood, because it is the increase in divorce, cohabitation and extra-marital birth that has fuelled its rise. This process needs to be understood in the context of a dramatic change to the institution of marriage, and the social organisation of intimacy, and more specifically the separation between partnership, reproduction, parenthood and marriage (Daly, 2005, Lewis, 2001). In other words the diversification of family forms goes hand in hand with an increased social recognition of coupledness and parenthood outside wedlock.

The Golden age of marriage prevailed in Western Europe between the 1950s and early 70s, when marriage was youthful and almost universal. Since then marriage rates have declined and age marriage risen, and this continues today. In the EU-25 the crude marriage rate fell from 6.7 to 4.8 between 1980 and 2003, and stayed the same in 2004, with a 2.2 million marriages (EUROSTAT, 2005). Recently the difference amongst the EU is less marked. EUROSTAT figures for 2004/3 showed that it ranged from 3.3% in Slovenia to 7.2 % in Cyprus. Greece stood at 4.2 and the UK slightly higher at 5.1 (ibid). Decrease in marriage goes hand in hand with an increase in divorce rates, which increased from 1.5 in 1980 to 2.0 in 2001, standing at nearly 1 million in 2004(ibid). A pattern of regional difference shows the rates to be much lower in Southern European Countries, and highest in the Baltic States, Czech Republic, Scandinavia and the UK (Daly, 2005). Cyprus has also seen a step increase from 0.3 in 1980 to 2.2 in 2004, according to EUROSTAT (ibid.).

The fall in fertility and marriage has gone hand in hand with an increase in cohabitation, which began to rise in the early 1980s, and in births outside marriage. Post marital cohabitation has always existed, but now cohabitation is an alternative or prelude to marriage. Across Western European Countries cohabitation is more common in France and the Nordic Countries, and very low in Ireland and Southern European countries (Kiernan, 1999a). The European Household Panel data of 1989 found an average of 9% for the EU15, ranging from 1% in Greece to 23% in Sweden. Still it must be remembered that comparative data on this is very scant and unreliable. The trend to have children outside marriage continues to rise. EUROSTAT estimates that in 2004 one in three live births in the EU-25 are outside marriage, compared to 9% in 1980. The

UK shows a higher than average rate of 42.3, whilst Cyprus and Greece are well below the average with a rate of 3.3 and 4.9 respectively (EUROSTAT, 2005).

Kiernan (1999b) shows that in the mid 90s in Western European Countries, the increase in extra-marital births is not linked to solo motherhood, but to women having children in cohabiting unions. Marriage still remains the pre-eminent setting to have children in Southern European countries, and much less so in the Nordic ones, France, and the UK, and more recently Ireland. In 2000 Sweden had more children born to cohabiting unions, than in marriage, whilst Cyprus continued to show the lowest rate of all (Kiernan, 1999b; Hantrais 2004). This trend continues, with Sweden having 55% of all live births outside marriage and Cyprus 3.3% in 2004. Greece remains very low with 4.9%, and the UK still showing an higher than average rate at 42.3% (EUROSTAT, 2005) Children are more likely to experience the separation of their parents if born in a cohabiting union than within marriage (Kiernan, 1999b).

Although the outcomes of family change across the EU are extremely diverse, it is possible, and important to identify cross-national differences. Daly (2005) argues that at the very least, a North/South continuum can be distinguished, with a tendency towards more one person households and more de-institutionalisation of family forms. Hantrais (2005) compares women's age at first marriage and childbirth with extramarital births and crude divorce rates, and includes the 2004 joining countries. She argues that greater de-institutionalisation and late family formation is starker in Denmark, France and Sweden. The UK and Finland follow suit although timing of family formation is closer to the EU mean. Poland and Slovakia head the opposite cluster where traditional family living goes hand in hand with conventional timing of family formation. Cyprus and Greece also belong to this cluster although they show more delayed family formation, so they are also quite similar to other Southern European countries which combine delayed family formation with de-institutionalisation. The Baltic States have gone furthest in de-institutionalisation but still retain more conventional timing in family formation. The final cluster in which conventional timing of family formation is combined with de-institutionalisation contains Central and Eastern Europe countries, as well as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, which show higher rates of de-institutionalisation.

Despite the complex diversity of family change in the EU, we can deduce some clear differences between the countries of object in this study. Cyprus and Greece show more traditional family forms. A less marked process of individualisation of the life course, with more multigenerational households and less one person household, goes hand in hand with a bigger fall in fertility, particularly in Greece. The de-institutionalisation of family forms is also far less marked than in England. Marriage still remains the pre-eminent setting for partnership, for having children and for parenthood. Divorce rates are much lower in Greece, and Cyprus is only just recently gone close to the EU-25 average. The UK has a higher than average rate of divorce and births outside marriage, whilst Cyprus and Greece are well below the average.

This difference in the process of de-institutionalisation is key to understanding the experiences of children in lone parent families in these three countries. Whilst in Cyprus and Greece lone parenthood is the by-product of divorce and spouse death, in the UK it is the rise of cohabitation and the birth of children within these unions, which is expected to soon eclipse divorce as the main engine for the dramatic increase of lone parent families in this country (Kiernan et, al 1998). These differences in de-institutionalisation are important not solely because the numbers, and profile of lone parents in the 3 countries is likely to be different. The level of social recognition that is placed on non-traditional family form is also likely to be different. Numbers and social visibility are key to understanding experiences of poverty and social exclusion. These children inhabit different social contexts, where people hold different meanings of what constitutes a 'normal', acceptable family form, which impact on their experiences of stigma and inclusion.

One parent families in Europe

Statistical comparisons at the EU level of lone parent families are particularly unreliable (Hantrais, 2004). Bradshaw (1998) compares different national estimates of the prevalence of lone parent families to EUROSTAT harmonised estimates. Sometimes these coincide and sometimes the differences are rather striking³. Comparing the prevalence of lone parent families from national data using harmonised definitions is equally problematic. Data may not be available, and if it is it may relate to different

³ For example, while in Italy the national estimate for lone parent families, as a percentage of all families with children, in 1992 was 6%, the estimate from EUROSTAT for the year 1990/1 was 16%.

years, different sources, and most importantly a diversity of definitions may be employed. The lone parent household is defined by two criteria: the presence of only one parent, and the economic dependence of at least one child, the latter mostly being measured by age and marital status. But the age criteria often vary⁴. In Southern European Countries a significant number of lone parents live with kin, and yet they are not always identified as lone parents in census collections (Giullari, 2002). Lone parenthood is heterogeneous and some countries, count as lone parents cohabitating couples, where the man is not the father of the children. So once again caution needs to be used when using harmonised data set and when comparing national data sets. In addition there is very little recent comparative data on lone parents in Europe. Most recent studies on lone parents have focused on a limited number of European countries, and no studies are available on the EU-25.

The ECHP survey, estimated that in 1996 12% of European households with children under 25 were lone parents, with the UK heading at 22%. The same sources of data shows that the numbers continued to rise, with 4.3 million lone parent households in the EU-15. By 2001, Sweden had taken first place with lone parents making up 22% of all households with dependent children, followed by the UK with 17%. Lone parenthood is much less prevalent in Southern Europe, and Greece stands at 4% (EUROSTAT, 2004). However Chambaz (2001) analysis of the ECHP 1996 data shows that the prevalence of lone parents in Southern European countries increases if we count those who live with their extended families, e.g. in Greece the increase was from 7 to 10 %.

Most lone parents in the EU-15 are women, 90% in 2001, with the Nordic countries having the highest number of lone fathers, 26% in Sweden. UK had 7% and Greece 9%. Age and marital status are related and show significant cross-national differences in social profile. Most lone parents were aged between 25 and 49 years, with Ireland and the UK showing higher rates of lone parents below 24 years of age. World Development Indicators indicate that in 2005 the UK came 5th after New Zealand, the Russian Federation and the US, in terms of teenage conceptions. In 1996 the divorced and separated made up of over half of all lone parents in the EU-15 (Chambaz, 2001). Higher numbers of single lone parents are in the Nordic countries and the UK. In comparison Greece, like the other Southern European countries, shows quite high rates

⁴ The European Community Household Panel Survey (ECHP) uses the age 25 criteria, whilst the European Labour Force Survey uses 15.

of older lone parents, 23% were aged between 50-65 suggesting a higher number of widows (EUROSTAT, 2004).

Lone mother families have a much higher risk of poverty, in comparison to two parent households and the whole population. Across the EU-14 in 1996, their standard of living was 23% below that of all households with children, and 27% below that of the whole population (Chambaz, 2001). There are important cross-national variations. In 1996 there was hardly any gap in Nordic countries and in the Southern European countries including Greece. In contrast this gap was greatest in the UK, and in Germany where lone parents were overrepresented amongst the poor (ibid.). The most recent data available, which is not very reliable, as it is an update of the last sweep of the ECHP survey based on national sources, suggests that the poverty risk remains much higher for lone parent families, and that similar patterns can be observed, although the UK seems to have improved. In 2003, when measuring poverty as 60% of the median income after social transfers, the risk remains very high in the UK at 40% for lone parents compared to 13% for couples and in Germany, 44% compared to 11% for couples. Cyprus shows much lower risk at 22% for lone parents compared to 13% for couples, which is closer to the Nordic rates: Denmark and Finland have a 18% and 19% risk for lone parents. On the other hand the risk of poverty for lone parents in Greece seems to have risen substantially, with 34% of lone parents at risk compared to 13% of two parent families (EUROSTAT, 2006⁵).

These cross-national differences are closely associated with working status, and the kind and level of social measures available to lone parents, which vary according to the strength of the male breadwinner model and by whether care work is valued (Lewis, 1997). It also depends on the type of child benefit package (Kilkey and Bradshaw, 2000) and on whether the extended family acts as an important source of income and childcare for lone parents (Chambaz, 2000; Giullari, 2002; Ruspini, 1999). In 2001 70% of all lone parents in the EU-15, aged between 25-49, were working at least 1 hour a week. Although out of these, most, 83%, were working full time, with very high rates in Denmark, Finland, Greece, France and Portugal (EUROSTAT, 2004). Until the late 1990s the UK has shown very low rates of lone parent employment: in 1996 the employment rate was 45% compared to 59% in Greece, 51% in Italy, 76% in France,

⁵http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1996.45323734&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=welcomeref&open=/&product=EU_MASTER_living_conditions_welfare&depth=2

75% in Denmark and Portugal (Chambaz, 2001). What's more the rate of part-time work amongst lone parents, and women in general, has for a long time been higher in the UK in comparison to most EU countries, apart from the Netherlands. In contrast full-time work characterises lone parents' employment in the Southern European countries, including Greece (Chambaz, 2001; Gonzales et al, 1999).

But poverty rates are also dependant on type and levels of social protection. Kilkey and Bradshaw (2000) found that in the early-mid 1990s, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Nordic countries, had high employment and a low of poverty rate amongst lone parents, because earnings and levels of social protection were comparatively high. The UK had low-employment and very high poverty rates. These were associated with high housing and childcare costs that reduce the relative high earning power, and low social assistance benefit, whilst Greece fell in the Southern European cluster, with high employment rates and low poverty rates irrespective of working status, and low social protection. Lewis (1997) found that in Nordic countries like Sweden lone parents were protected as mothers and workers, and this protected them from poverty. In the UK up until the mid 90's lone mothers were conceived as mothers and as such they were entitled to low levels of benefits, and not supported into employment, hence facing very high risk of poverty. The case of the Southern European countries is rather different: here the extended family, not the male breadwinner is seen as the main provider of welfare (Giullari, 2002). Lone mothers are an invisible policy category and escape poverty by a heavy reliance on kin for income and childcare (Bimbi, 1997; Chambaz 2001; Ruspini, 1999).

Indeed if we look at differences in child poverty rates in Europe analysed by Bradshaw (2006) we can see that although Sweden has the highest number of children living in lone parent families, in 2003 it had the lowest child poverty rate across 27 EU countries. The UK is second after Sweden in terms of numbers of children living in lone parent families. Its record of child poverty has much improved since the mid 1990s, when it had the third highest poverty rate across 25 developed countries and the highest amongst the EU-15. Still the latest EUROSTAT data⁶ available ranks it at 21st place, alongside Greece and Poland, out of 27 countries. Cyprus shows a much lower child poverty rate, ranked 6 out of 27th.

⁶ see footnote 5.

To sum up, bearing in mind that we have very little comparative data especially on Cyprus, and that what we have available is not very reliable, we can detect very broad patterns of cross-national differences in terms of the prevalence and socio-economic profile, and poverty risk of lone parent families in Europe. Amongst the EU-15 a North-South divide emerges in line with a different process of de-institutionalisation of family forms, and individualization of the life course. In the Nordic countries, prevalence of lone parent families is much higher, as is the number of single lone parents. Lone parents tend to be in full-time work and social transfers are very effective in reducing poverty. The risk of poverty for children and adults living in lone parent families and for children in general is much lower. In the South lone parents tend to be older; widowhood remains an important route in lone parenthood, and a significant number live with their kin. It is the reliance on kin in conjunction with high full-employment rates that reduces the risk of poverty.

Comparing this profile for the 3 countries of study is rather difficult on the basis of the available comparative data. We can with some certainty see that the UK stands out as having: the second highest number of lone parent families after Sweden; a high proportion of single/ never married; the third highest poverty risk, after Ireland and Germany, across the EU-25 (EUROSTAT, 2006), and one of the highest child poverty risk alongside Greece and Poland, after Italy, Portugal and the Slovak Republic (Bradshaw, 2006). The reasons why the UK rate remains high is mostly because it has the highest proportion of children living in lone parent families who are not in employment, and jobless families have a comparatively high risk of poverty in the UK. Lone parents are now supported as workers (Lewis, 2001), and the employment rate for lone parents has increased significantly, now currently standing at 56.6%, according to national government data. Despite improvements, the child benefit package in UK is means-tested, more generous for families with just one child, and undermined by high housing and childcare costs and as such is much less effective than the Swedish package in reducing child poverty (Bradshaw, 2006). Those who enter motherhood at an early age tend to have much lower human capital and tend to come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hobcraft and Kiernan, 2001). Furthermore, in England at least, cohabitating couples tend to be poorest amongst two parent families (Kiernan et al, 1998).

The case of Greece is puzzling because EUROSTAT's most recent estimates suggests that the poverty risk for lone parents is now closer to the UK rates than Spain⁷, as is the risk of child poverty, despite the fact that lone parents in Greece shares a similar socio-economic profile to the rest of the Southern European countries. Given the little comparative data available for Cyprus it is really impossible to draw any conclusion on this case. The prevalence of traditional family forms suggests similar numbers and socio-economic profile to that of Greece. Yet the risk of poverty for lone parent families seems much lower, and perhaps this might be explainable by the much lower child poverty risk.

Drawing some tentative comparative conclusions about the prevalence, socio-economic profile and poverty risk for lone parent families in the 3 countries of study, is tempting as it is key to understanding whether and how children living in lone parent families, experience poverty and social exclusion in similar and/or different ways. The difference in numbers and marital status can affect the level of social recognition and stigma experienced. Widowhood carries a much more positive connotation, than single/never married parenthood. Living in a context where single lone parenthood is common, can result in a different type of stigma, social and policy recognition. Comparative analysis of the English and Italian case, have shown that in the latter, low numbers, low social recognition of new family forms, high employment rates and heavy reliance on extended family, has made lone mothers families invisible to the policy debate. In contrast to England where their high numbers and their reliance on social transfer in a context where family de-institutionalisation is high and socially recognised, has made them a key social and policy category for over two decades (Bimbi 1997; Giullari, 2002).

But given the lack and unreliability of comparative data, the most valid way of doing so is for each national report to present a review of national data on the socio-economic profile and poverty risks faced by one parent families in each national context.

⁷ Data for Italy and Portugal is not available.

Children as competent social actors

The study of children was for much of the 20th century based on the assumption that children are incomplete adults, who are in the process of growing up, and therefore in need of socialization by adults. Until the 1980s and even more recently, many of the studies which addressed children focused on their putative passive nature: children come to gradually absorb the rules and norms of society and eventually are fully incorporated into it. What is lacking in these studies is a sense that children are social actors, that is, individuals, who have consciousness, interpret the world that surrounds them, act on this world, and potentially impact it.

During the last three decades, these normative approaches have gradually come under criticism from social scientists (e.g., Hardman 1973; Mackay 1974; Richards 1974; Tonkin 1982; James and Prout 1990) who have tried to illustrate the limitations of approaches that treat children as passive and naïve and presented alternative evidence which foregrounds the creative role that children play in their own lives, in short, their agency (James and Prout 1990, pp.15-16). These approaches which focused on context and the creation of meaning by active social agents encouraged the rethinking of children's role in social life (Caputo 1995, p.25). Thus, in the last 15 years we have seen in the work of researchers like Corsaro and his associates (e.g., Corsaro 1992; Corsaro and Rizzo 1988) an attempt to develop an interpretive approach to childhood socialization which emphasizes the creative agency of children and their active role in the construction of their own worlds and in the reproduction of adult cultures.

The intensive theoretical concern with issues of structure and agency evident in the social sciences today, and the recognition that the old paradigms were too limiting in explaining childhood as a social phenomenon, encouraged renewed interest in the study of childhood. James and Prout (1990, p.3), for example, argued for an 'emergent paradigm' that "will consolidate and continue the change in direction initiated by the research of the 1970s" (see also James, Jenks, and Prout 1998). For these researchers, children and childhood are constituted by different discourses which are in turn constituted by children's lives. The main principles of this new paradigm as outlined by James and Prout (1990, pp.3-5, 8-9) are as follows:

- a) childhood is a social construction, not a natural category and should not be confused with biological immaturity which is universal,
- b) childhood should not be analyzed in isolation but always in relation to other relevant social variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity,
- c) children's social worlds and cultures are worthy of study in their own right and from children's own points of view and not just in relation to adults,
- d) children are not passive subjects in society but play an active role in the construction of their own lives and their own social worlds as well as the lives and worlds of those around them,
- e) ethnography is a particularly good method for giving a voice to children and for gaining insights of their worlds.

This perspective seeks to foreground children's subjectivity by studying children as social actors involved both in the reproduction and transformation of culture. Children's activities, experiences, attitudes, beliefs, values, opinions, and thoughts are therefore important and necessary concerns for the study of childhood socialization. Though, it is still a premature effort, it is ultimately the first step in fully integrating children in society on an equal footing with adults.

The need for including children's voices in research and policy making

Much of the research carried out on single parent families has focused on the problems and challenges faced by these families but the voices of the children who belong to these families have largely remained silent. The perspectives of adults such as parents, teachers and other professionals are given priority over and above children's voices. This is largely due to the often unstated assumptions about children and childhood which attribute to them a qualitatively lower ability to understand and comment on the world as compared to adults as well as a general lack of rational thought that prevents them from objectively evaluating their life conditions (James and Prout 1990; James, Jenks, and Prout 1998). Such assumptions have been challenged in recent years by several researchers who have shown that children are fully capable of making sense of the world that surrounds them and that researchers need to offer them opportunities to voice their own concerns, interests, agendas, and perspectives. Policy-making, like so many other social and political processes, is still far from integrating children's perspectives. This lack of integration results in policies and programs which lack the necessary sensitivity to children's needs even when children are the principal group that such policies and programs target.

In recent years, this challenge of taking children's perspectives into account has been taken seriously by scholars and practitioners who wish to see the development of more socially cohesive societies where children are fully integrated and their views, opinions, and feelings are taken into account when formulating policy and taking decisions which affect them (see James and Prout 1990; Pryor and Rodgers 2001; Smart, Neale, and Wade 2001; Neale 2002; Moxnes 2003, Smith, Taylor and Tapp 2003; Dunn and Deater-Deckard 2001). When considering policies to combat poverty and social exclusion faced by single parent families, the children's points of view can present a different understanding of the family's life circumstances compared to those of the single parent (see for instance Demo and Acock 1996) which is not of course the only valid perspective but certainly one that should be considered together with the perspective of the parent and of other implicated adults who work with these families in their professional capacity (e.g., social workers).

These more integrative ways of thinking about policy-making are today beginning to become more accepted and considered to be more effective in combating social

problems like poverty and social exclusion faced by vulnerable groups such as single parent families. Thus, for instance, the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006 focuses on policies which aim at improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of comparable indicators. This is to be achieved by organizing exchanges on policies which promote mutual learning in the context of national action plans, by developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty effectively, and by promoting innovative approaches. Similarly, the Open Method of Coordination used by the European Union aims to encourage the democratic participation of different stakeholders by incorporating local knowledge in policy-making through the inclusion of local-level actors such as children.

Given that the voices of children from single parent families are entirely absent from policy debates, it is important to focus on the lived experiences of these children and their families so that the policies formulated, the laws established, and the programmes designed and carried out will have relevance to these children's real needs. Investigating how these children understand and experience their worlds can inform policy making so that interventions will be effective and ultimately improve the lives of single parent families in the most appropriate and culturally-sensitive manner. Moreover, given their socially vulnerable positions, children are often disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion; focusing on them brings out a much-neglected aspect of our knowledge about, and understanding of, single parent families.

The UN convention for the rights of the child

The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child is perhaps the single most important document that safeguards children's rights at an international level. The importance of this document for children's rights is widely acknowledged, not least, from the fact that since its adoption in 1989 it has been ratified by all states (195 in total) with the exception of the US and Somalia. This international support for the Convention and the fact that it is considered a legally binding document (superior to national law) and monitored through periodically by the UN to assess compliance by states, makes it a potentially powerful tool for implementing children's rights around the world; unfortunately, the reality is quite different with most children being denied on a daily basis from basic human rights.

Article 12 of the Convention deserves special mention in the context of this study, primarily because it advocates children's rights to express themselves and be heard. The Article states: "State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." This Article, more than any other of the Convention, provides children with the right to participate in society especially in matters that affect their lives and requires from adults that they listen to children and take into consideration their points of views. Cynics, of course, can readily see how this Article can be easily manipulated by adults and become nothing more than tokenism. Nevertheless, Article 12 lays the foundation for taking inclusionary measures by signatory states to increase and democratize children's participation in society. The indirect effect of a document such as the Convention on local level policy processes is well-illustrated by the publication in the UK of *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (Children and Young People's Unit 2001) which guides government departments on how to develop policies to enable and increase the participation of children in policy-making (as quoted in James and James 2004, pp.87-88). Thus, the internationalization of the rights of children is ongoing though it is often resisted by national and cultural interests and agendas (James and James 2004, p.94). Given that all European states have ratified the Convention and that one of the key policy objectives of the EU is to combat poverty and social exclusion, the time has matured for integrating children's perspectives in policy-making, not merely because they are

children, but also because the policies which target them need to be informed by their own understandings and views if they are to be sensitive and effective.

National policy and commitment to children's participation

CYPRUS

Children's participation in social life is still quite limited in Cyprus. Three institutional examples of children's participation are:

1) Student Councils: There is democratic representation of students in a central council in secondary schools, which represents student voices in discussions and decisions made at the level of Ministry of Education and Culture.

2) School Disciplinary Committees: Regulations for managing behavioral problems in primary education include participation of students in the final formulation of rules for each class so as to ensure their participation and understanding. There is a gradation of punishments ranging from reprimand in private to reprimand in the presence of the parents to referral to a school committee, if necessary, with the participation of the school psychologist who may recommend necessary changes (e.g., transfer to another class or referral to the Ministry of Education for further action).

3) Youth Parliament: There is a Youth Parliament Programme where high school students convene once a year in the House of Representatives to discuss and make recommendations to the state and society in general about matters which concern them. Representatives from this body sometimes travel to other countries to convey the views of Cypriot youth.

In general, however, the discourse surrounding children's participation in Cyprus is still quite undeveloped with little public discussion. Though the country is a signatory of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, the periodic reports of the committee evaluating the country's progress makes several recommendations for increasing children's participation in social life. A workshop held in 2005 to provide input for the development of the NAP included among others the following recommendations which relate to children's participation and rights:

- 1) It is necessary to facilitate the inclusion of children's rights in legislation and social policy,

- 2) It is necessary to establish the institution of the Commissioner for Children's Rights (currently underway),
- 3) It is necessary to sensitize adults (families, state, politicians and mass media) about children's rights,
- 4) Public officials must put children's interests and rights at the center of their daily work,
- 5) It is necessary to strengthen children's participation with the granting of the right to vote on issues that affect them,
- 6) The government must put children at the center of its policies giving primacy to issues that affect them,
- 7) Research on these issues must be facilitated (NAP 2004, p. 97-98).

UK

As Davis and Hill (2006:9) suggests, "Connecting the concepts of social inclusion and participation as interrelated themes with respect to children offers the prospect of enhancing our understanding of the nature and consequences of several key interactions for children and social exclusion." However a vital factor for children's participation is power, or rather the lack of power held by children which excludes them from meaningful participation (Lister 2002).

Participation is defined as involvement in personal and public decisions, about their own lives, about the development and provision of services at a local level and where national policies and services are being developed or evaluated. The theme of participation is linked to the issues of citizenship and social inclusion through consideration of issues such as children's rights, empowerment, responsibility and improved relationships and perception of young people amongst communities, professionals and peers (Kirby et al, 2003). Whilst it could be suggested that until the late 1980's that children and young people were largely excluded from participation (Qvortrup, 1997), within the UK there is evidence that, strategically at least, this position has changed markedly. However it should be noted that a number of commentators have questioned if the development of practice initiatives reflect a genuine commitment to promoting the citizenship rights of children and young people (Crimmens, 2004; Mori, 2004; Hendrickson and Bainham, 2005): priority is given to be seen to be promoting the participation of children and young people rather than participation per se. The principle of children's participation and involvement has been

increasingly accepted and turned into practice through a variety of participation activities across a range of organisations. This is reflected in the growing shift of UK policy, requiring children and young people's participation, made clear by the Government:

(In all government departments) a visible commitment is made to involving children and young people, underpinned by appropriate resources to build a capacity to implement policies of participation (and that) the contributions of children and young people are taken seriously and acted upon, and feedback from children and young people confirms this. (DfES⁸)

This is promoted in law, policy and guidance: the Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1990); Every Child Matters (2004), within such initiatives such as the Children's Trusts and the Children's Fund (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk) and Sure Start (www.surestart.gov.uk); the Children's Act 2004 (2004), and within government inspection regimes, especially Joint Area Reviews (www.ofsted.gov.uk). Many national initiatives and policies have highlighted children and young people's participation as a crucial element: in relation to the environment (www.sustainable-development.gov.uk), community regeneration and local strategic partnerships (www.neighbourhood.gov.uk), support and advice to young people (www.connexions.gov.uk), Children's Services Planning, through a single overarching plan for all local services for children and young people, (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk) and the introduction of "Citizenship" as a mandatory subject within the National Education Curriculum for children and young people (www.citizenship.gov.uk). Willow (2002) had identified twenty-one major government initiatives which claim to provide opportunities for children to participate in decisions at a local level. Key appointments have been made to specifically focus on raising the profile of children and young people within England: a Minister for Children and Children's Commissioner. The Children's Commissioner for England (www.childrenscommissioner.org.uk) is a non-departmental public body whose remit is to promote the interests and act as the voice for all children and young people in England and Wales. In addition the Children's Commissioner for England has a UK-wide responsibility for non-devolved matters including asylum and immigration.

⁸ www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn

In line with these changes, there is now an increasing level of varied activity under the general title of children's participation across statutory and voluntary sectors. Organisations such as the Children's Society, National Children's Bureau, Barnardo's, British Youth Council, Save the Children and National Youth Agency have, at some level, been engaging with children and young people in participation projects and building up a wealth of experience to inform good practice. There has also been the development of organisations run by or with children and young people, for example the UK Youth Parliament (www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk) and Children's Express (www.childrens-express.org), a national news agency, and a charity, where young people aged 8-18 produce articles on issues that are important to them.

The challenge is translating this commitment in practice to one that is meaningful for children and young people, to ensure it is effective in bringing about change and is embedded within individual and organisational practice. However, the extent or level of children's involvement in decision-making is not consistent across different subjects or sectors. According to Kirby et al (2003: 30):

Much of the current literature ... on the nature of participation, tends to portray children's participation as a somewhat separate or fragmented set of activities, rather than embedded approach. Also it can be seen that in practice the term participation children is often used simply to mean 'involved in' or being 'consulted'. In this sense the term takes in a very passive connotation. This is in contrast to active participation, which could be taken to imply some presumption of empowerment of those involved – that children believe, and have reason to believe that their involvement will make a difference.

Although evidence suggests that children are participating in community development and urban renewal, this is still largely dependent on the culture and styles of the professionals facilitating these processes. For example, a national evaluation of the impact of the Children's Fund (DfES, 2004 and 2006) reported that professionals and adults' definitions of participation have tended to predominate, rather than those of children and young people themselves; participation was primarily equated with consultation activity. They emphasised the need for partnerships to develop shared definitions of participation and to develop a coherent strategy in implementing participation.

No specific evidence could be identified that related to children and young people living with single parents. However a number of studies have identified the difficulties of involving children and young people who were assumed to be 'hard to reach' or hard to reach children and young people, specifically black and minority children and young people, refugee families and young carers, those living in rural areas, disaffected and marginalised children and young people (Oldfield and Fowler, 2004; Calder and Cope (2004); Wright and Haydon, (2002.) McNeish (1999) identifies among a number of factors that serve to magnify barriers to participation, particularly for young people, those who have had difficult life experiences as having less confidence and self-esteem to participate.

GREECE

The Greek Ombudsman, Department of Children's Rights

The Greek Ombudsman is a constitutionally established Independent Authority. It was founded in October 1998 and operates under the provisions of Law 3094/2003. The Ombudsman provides its services to the public free of charge. The mission of the Greek Ombudsman is to mediate between the public sector and private individuals, in order to protect the latter's citizens' rights, to ensure the former's compliance with the rule of law, and to combat maladministration. The new Law 3094/2003 introduced among others a significant addition to the Ombudsman's jurisdiction: the Ombudsman has assumed the mission of defending and promoting children's rights. The Ombudsman is assisted by five Deputy Ombudsmen, one of whom is appointed as Deputy Ombudsman for children. For the protection of children's rights the Ombudsman also has jurisdiction over matters involving private individuals, physical or legal persons, who violate children's rights.

In the context of its mission, the Department of Children's Rights:

- Mediates in specific cases in which a child's rights are being violated, following a complaint filed by a citizen, aiming at the protection of the child and at the restitution of his/her rights. If necessary, in cases of serious violations, the Ombudsman acts on its own initiative.
- Undertakes initiatives in order to monitor and promote the implementation of international conventions and of the national legislation on children's rights, to inform the public, to exchange views with representatives of other institutions and to elaborate and submit proposals to the government.

The Department monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and disseminates its principles. It also monitors the effect of the existing legal context on children's life. For this purpose, the Department can investigate fields of social life that considers to be of special interest and drafts special reports, which it submits to the relevant ministries. It makes children aware not only of their rights but also of the ways they can defend these rights. For this purpose, the Department disposes of special printed material, a special telephone line and a dynamic interactive website. It undertakes initiatives in order to raise awareness, to sensitize and guide parents and to instruct professionals working with children. It organizes meetings with groups of children in the spaces where they live, are educated, where they meet and spend their everyday life, in order to listen to their views, their problems and their suggestions. It cooperates and communicates with public services and non-governmental organizations, which work with children, with educational communities etc. It also participates actively in relevant seminars, conferences, committees and networks.

Child-centred studies on children's experiences of poverty and social exclusion

From the perspective of children, the effects of poverty are experienced not only in material terms, but across all aspects of their lives. Poverty impacts on their social and family relationships, their attitudes and behaviour, and their opportunities and choices. Many children are acutely aware of the direct links between their family's income and their own life experiences and opportunities.

Family Relationships and Responsibilities

Children's close and confiding relationships with parents are an important source of emotional support. However, Attree (2006) argued that whilst family relationships can be supportive and help reduce the impact of disadvantage for children, they may themselves be undermined by the effects of poverty. It is apparent that poverty affects the nature of the child-adult role within the home, particularly within single parent families. Many children have to take on adult responsibilities impacting on the amount of time they have to play with friends and their emotional well-being. In a qualitative study of 61 children aged 8-15 years, living with single parent mothers recently returned to work, Ridge (2006) found that almost all the children were involved in some type of housework. Boys as well as girls regularly performed a range of household tasks including cleaning, tidying, vacuuming, dusting, polishing and washing up. Children claimed there had been an increase in their housework responsibilities since their mother had taken up employment. Whilst most children appeared to undertake their housework freely, some suggested there was pressure from their mother to do such chores.

Responsibility for sibling child care is another role frequently undertaken by older children living in a single parent household. Childline (2006) undertook a quantitative study of children who contacted their organisation for help and guidance during 2004/05. Over this period they counselled 1,041 children who said that parental divorce or separation was the main reason for wanting to speak to a counsellor, and a further 3,253 who called the helpline for other reasons, but said divorce or separation was also an issue in their lives. ChildLine found that many children, even as young as 11 and 12 years old, had to care for siblings whilst their parent worked. As a result of their care responsibilities, children were often unable to play after school or visit friends. A significant proportion admitted to being anxious about their responsibilities, but wary of

mentioning these concerns to their parent, usually their mother, since she was felt to have enough to worry about already.

Ridge (2006) also commented on the sibling caring role, undertaken especially by older children. She observed that in several cases, care provided by the elder child was integral to the mother being able to work. Other children said they had more irregular caring responsibilities, ensuring on a more ad hoc basis that their mother had a break from looking after the younger children.

Children may additionally take on fairly extensive responsibilities in relation to sustaining the well-being of their single parent. Several children, especially girls, mention spending time giving emotional support to their lone parent mothers (Ridge, 2006). This caring role can involve trying to make sure their mothers are happy at work and at home. Childline (2006) found that some children were staying in during the evenings instead of socialising with friends because they worried their mother would be lonely if they left her in the house. Boys were sometimes conscious of having the role of the man in the family, and felt a need to provide physical and emotional protection to ensure their mother was safe at home and when out socialising.

Social Activities

Poverty can restrict the type and range of social activities in which children are able to engage. A qualitative research study conducted amongst 101 young people aged 12-15 years, attending two schools in relatively deprived wards in a S.E. England town (Morrow, 2001), found that younger children were concerned about not having decent places to play where they lived. Older children talked about the financial costs which presented a barrier to enjoying themselves by going out of their immediate area, for example, into town, to find entertainment. They also mentioned feeling unwelcome in the town centres because of getting so many 'dirty looks' from shop keepers, security guards and adults generally.

Children commonly felt there was not enough to do in their local area due to a dearth of leisure facilities. Many described spending time playing out in local parks with friends, and few were involved in organised voluntary activities such as sports teams. The latter were sometimes described as prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, some young people

said they felt excluded from the spaces immediately around their homes because of the proliferation of ‘no ball games’ signs on patches of communal grass (Morrow, 2001).

Qualitative research involving in-depth interviews across the UK with 40 children aged 10-17 years, living in low-income households (Ridge, 2002), identified transport and participation costs as particularly restrictive factors on children’s capacity to engage in social activities. Children felt that because of such costs they were unable to enjoy many of the same social and leisure experiences their peers took for granted. Furthermore, they were often uncertain as to whether or not they would be able to gain access to sufficient funds to go out and share social activities with their friends. Nearly half the children in the research sample lived in households without a car which presented children, particularly in rural areas, with a serious problem in being able to access social facilities or be able to meet up with friends. Children regularly bussed into their rural schools complained that costly and infrequent rural transport prevented them staying on at school for activities or meeting up with their friends to play in after-school hours.

Davis and Ridge (1997) in a qualitative study of 95 children aged 8-19 years, living in families receiving Income Support and/or free school meals in West Somerset, also found access to transport an issue in terms of exclusion from social activities. A number of children, particularly those living in rural areas or with single parents, said they faced problems in terms of being able to get transport to take them to social activities with friends or peers.

Social Acceptance and Relationships

The impacts of poverty on children’s capacity to make and sustain friendships and achieve social acceptability are apparent from several child-centred research studies. Children put a high value on their friendships, but are very aware of how limited finances can restrict their opportunities for friendship and social inclusion. Middleton et al (1994) carried out both quantitative and qualitative research amongst 130 children of 8-16 years old in the Midlands and North of England, living in more and less affluent areas. They noted that restrictions on children’s social participation linked to poverty meant that children began to have a sense of being ‘different’ at a fairly young age. A qualitative study by Roker (1998), conducted with 60 children aged 13-18 years living in families dependent on welfare benefit on the South coast, West of England and Scotland, found that some children felt embarrassed about their financial circumstances,

particularly if their social activities were constrained by low family income. Ridge (2002) elicited considerable fear amongst some children in terms of experiencing stigma and difference because of poverty and disadvantage. They were highly sensitive to the potential dangers of social exclusion if they were unable to engage in the social activities of their friends and fit in with their social groups.

Middleton (1994) observed that life for children from low income households can be a constant struggle to avoid being set apart from friends and peers. Social acceptance for many children, especially teenagers, is about being able to dress in a similar way to friends by wearing the same brand of clothes and shoes (Morrow, 2001). Yet as Ridge (2002) revealed teenagers, especially girls, living in poverty can struggle to keep up with fashion trends and such failure is often met with verbal abuse, teasing or bullying from peers. Similarly, Middleton (1994) found that some children linked social inclusion with keeping up appearances, and they worried about potential bullying if unable to do so.

Another area of disadvantage in terms of social acceptance is children's limited capacity to participate in school trips. Many children said they felt excluded from school trips enjoyed by their peers, because their parent was unable to afford the costs involved (Ridge, 2002).

Future Opportunities

A common conclusion from child-centred studies on children's experiences of poverty and social exclusion is that these experiences tend to have a strong impact on children's life expectations. Children can become resigned to living in poverty and regard the economic and social limitations they face as normal and the status quo for someone like them (Middleton, 1994), (Roker, 1998) and (Ridge, 2002). They may also learn to 'make do' with limited resources and develop coping mechanisms in order protect themselves and their parents from some of the direct impacts of poverty, for example, self-excluding themselves from school trips for which they know their parent will not be able to find the finances. In turn, this can further deprive the child of opportunities to achieve and advance, by denying them access to educational learning activities (Ridge, 2002).

The experience of poverty also has a detrimental effect on children's future hopes and aspirations. They can feel that poverty impacts on their self-esteem, confidence and personal development (Ridge, 2002). Whilst some children express optimism about their future education and employment opportunities, many are aware of the negative restrictions dictated by their social and economic environment (Roker, 1998). A quantitative UK-wide study amongst 435 children aged 5-16 years old (Shrophire and Middleton, 2005), identified children from lone-parent or Income Support families as having significantly lower career aspirations, than children from either two-parent or non-Income Support families. Children from the former group were also more likely to want jobs requiring limited training or few academic qualifications.

Children's daily activities, experiences, friendships and interactions with peers

The literature that explores the daily lives of children in Europe offers only occasional glimpses into the specific experiences of children living in single-parent households. The lack of research and literature on this area is even more stark when searching for material that focuses on the perspectives of the children themselves, yet there is a range of literature that considers the experience of single-parenthood, for example Kiernan et al, 1998; Hardy and Crow, 1991; and Duncan and Edwards, 1997. Further to this there is an 'under-representation of young children' in the literature and policy documentation (Moss et al 2005: 4). However, Aves (2006) provides a comprehensive discussion about the lives of 6-7 years in the United Kingdom, including consideration of the experience of school; friendship and gender identity; and family relationships, but within this the only specific reference to developing as a child within a single-parent family is a paragraph where role models and personal identity are considered (p.61).

In contrast, in their text that explores family composition and ideology, Jensen, and McKee (2003) report on research into the experience of change in families, from the child's point of view. These edited chapters offer an international approach with contributions from Scandinavia, UK and America exploring how issues such as parental employment; family composition and change can impact upon the experience of childhood. Thus, for example, in their chapter on childhood after divorce, Wade and Smart (2003, p.117) consider the complex lives of children living in post-divorce families and how children 'appear as actively engaged moral philosophers' who

navigate the ‘expectations, disappointments and challenges’ of these changing forms of family life.

There is also a growing body of literature that considers change in terms of family values and their impact on the lives of children in those families. In Greece, for example, it is noted that there is evidence of movement from the extended family system to a more nuclear form of family unit, with further differences noted between families living in the city of Athens and those in rural communities (James, 1989). These essentially demographic observations have consequent influences on family values, expectations and societal norms, which in turn impact upon the experiences and perceptions of family members, particularly the children. In a later study, James et al (1997) make the connection between family values, culture and inter-family relationships. James et al state that Greek and Cypriot families live within a broadly collectivist culture, whilst in Britain, family lives and values can be aligned to a more individualist approach and thus variability in family bonds and extended family relationships can be seen to be context specific.

When exploring what is known more specifically about the daily activities of children who live in single-parent families, the literature continues to offer generalised information. Analysis of the 2003 Families and Children Study in Britain (Willitts et al, 2005) reveals that the activities and leisure habits of children aged 11-15, not exclusively those living with one-parent, centred around watching television, using the computer, communicating using a mobile phone and participating in sports. Similarly research into Greek children’s use of computers in their every-day lives, demonstrated that many children (305 of the 993 children in the project) had a home computer, which was mostly used for games (Vryzas and Tsitouridou, 2002). In other areas of activity, 75% of the children participating in the British research (Willitts et al, 2005) had been on holiday, whilst 35% of them reported doing some form of paid work in the previous week. These children also described how their parents controlled certain elements of their leisure activities by, for example, setting limits on the amount or type of television programme they watched. In this same age-group Willitts et al (2005) report that 5% of the children stated that they smoked cigarettes regularly with 2% drinking alcohol regularly.

Education, in whatever form it takes, across each of the comparator countries, constitutes a significant influence on the lives of all children. For many, school offers a vast range of challenges and opportunities which are, on the whole, positive, but for a few children, particularly those who are considered to be in vulnerable groups, school may be a place of exclusion, fear, oppression and rejection (Horner and Krawczyk, 2006: x). Accordingly in recent years in the UK, there has been a growing recognition of the social roles played by schools and education in the lives of children and young people (Horner and Krawczyk, 2006: xi). Additionally, in the context of Greek education, the significance of religion, within educational policies, shaping identity development and potentially compounding social exclusion is identified (Zambeta, 2000).

Whilst, again, the literature does not specify details of the educational experiences of children living with only one of their parents, Horner and Krawczyk (2006: 49) in discussing areas of educational difficulty, make a clear connection between aspects of the family, children's behaviours and their experiences in school, in that '...recent research evidence reinforces the view of family values as a significant determinant of educational engagement – or conversely of disaffection.' This is further supported by Newburn and Shiner (2005, p.13) who state that 'the odds of a young person from a low-skilled family engaging in a high level of truancy are 80% higher than for a person from professional or managerial family'. Further to this, cross-national comparative research looking at the family in modern societies in Britain and Spain, reported by Hakim, draws on the notion of 'parental cultural capital' as having an impact on children's experiences, attitudes and values in respect of their education (Hakim, 2003: 200-1).

In September, 2006, the Children's Society in the UK, launched a two-year inquiry (The Good Childhood Inquiry) into how the pressures of modern living impact on the experience of childhood. A preliminary survey for this inquiry showed that young people were particularly anxious about school work, with pressures from school, including exams and testing, being one element of problems that may contribute to children's anxiety. Furthermore, according to recent and on-going research (Bradshaw, 2006), the UK, compared to other European Union member states, performs badly in bringing about the wellbeing of its children. The evidence indicates that children in the

UK have poorer relationships, engage in riskier behaviour and suffer from worse health than other European children.

In respect of the friendships and interactions with peers experienced by children from single-parent families, there is, again, sparse literature that is specific to children in this group. As before, with specific reference to younger children in the UK, but not only those living with one parent, Aves (2006) emphasises the significance of friendships for all children, with the child's peer group being 'influential in defining who they are' (p. 41). Additionally, Aves (2006: 49) acknowledges the importance of such interactions in enabling children to learn about difference and whilst Aves does not directly refer to difference in relation to family structure, she does consider that children's 'feelings about others who are different from them is influenced by internal factors, but the attitudes encouraged at school play a significant part' (ibid). Further to this Moxnes (2003) offers an insight into the perspectives of children who, due to family change or work environments, are subject to different home moves across geographical areas. One of the most significant issues for these children related to integration, losing friends and making new friendships, and that 'difficulties finding new friends often led to social isolation ...' (ibid, p.96).

Thus the literature underlines the importance of friendships and peer networks, but conveys little about the quality or experience of them particularly for the children of single-parent families. It is possible, however, to glean some insight from literature and research relating to the social support networks of the single parent. For example, Duncan and Edwards (1997: 6) explain how 'localized networks of kin and friends can be significant materially, including providing single mothers and child-care support in contexts where there is little publicly funded provision available' but the authors warn that the experience of such networks is subjective and influenced by local social attitudes and the individual's own perceptions.

Opportunities and Limitations faced by Children of Single Parent Families

Financial understanding

Children from single parent families evidence a keen awareness and understanding of their family's financial situation. A qualitative study carried out amongst 61 lone-parent children aged 8-15 years living in various areas of England (Ridge, 2006), found high awareness of their family's household costs and expenditure. The children could confidently detail the price of essential everyday items such as food, petrol, electricity and gas. A quantitative study by Shropshire and Middleton (2005) amongst 435 children aged 5-16 years, 43% of whom lived in lone-parent families, revealed that lone-parent children were the most likely to learn about the family's financial circumstances from their parents. More lone parents than parents from two-parent families were said to discuss family income (31% versus 13%) and household spending (45% versus 33%) with their children. Lone-parent children were also more conscious of their family's limited finances. Two-thirds of children living in a single parent family said they frequently had requests for money turned down by their parent for reasons of affordability, compared with less than half of the children from two-parent families.

Money management

Nonetheless, children from single parent families have limited opportunities to develop any personal skills in managing money, or practical knowledge of budgeting and spending. Ridge (2002) found in a qualitative survey amongst 40 children living in either one or two-parent families in receipt of Income Support, that very few received regular pocket money. For the majority of children, their family's constrained financial circumstances meant they only had ad hoc access to their own spending money. Similarly, Shropshire and Middleton (2005) observed that children living in lone-parent families were less likely than other children to receive pocket money or to have part-time jobs. Therefore they had fewer opportunities to learn how to manage their own money.

Financial worries

Single parent children have a greater propensity to express worry and concern about their family's financial resources than children living in two-parent families. Asked whether they thought their family had sufficient money to live on, 39 % of children living in lone-parent families said they had 'not enough money' and 50% said they had 'just enough money', as compared with figures of 9% and 66% respectively amongst

children of two-parent families (Shropshire and Middleton, 1999). Ridge (2006) found that children with lone-parent mothers recently returned to work generally felt better off, but there were some who did not, especially those with mothers in very low-paid employment. Furthermore, children across the research sample, whether their mother was working or not, consistently said they were concerned about the financial situation of the family and were often actively engaged in trying to help reduce the financial pressures.

Coping strategies

Children living in poverty develop a range of often complex methods and techniques to enable them to cope with their financial situation. Shropshire and Middleton (1999) revealed that at a relatively young age many children living in single parent families learn not to ask for things they want, since their parent will not be able to deliver. Single parent children were also found to internalise at an early age an understanding that they might not get what they want for birthdays, and to hide their disappointment. Ridge (2006) found that despite an increased family income from their mothers return to work, several single parent children were still trying to cope with the effects of poverty by controlling and restraining their financial requests and needs. Some of their behaviour in this respect could be quite surreptitious, for example, when feeling ill they might decide not to tell their mother so avoiding to have a day off school, since it would mean their mother losing a day's pay in order to care for them.

In tandem with using coping strategies, children often utilise specific strategies to maximise their financial resources. Ridge (2002) observed that as a consequence of receiving little or no pocket money, children were using a range of different tactics to persuade parents to provide more pocket money or buy the clothes they wanted, including constant requests, begging, and negotiating to help with housework chores in return for money. Several children were also using persuasion on their grandparents or non-resident parent to generate pocket money or financial gifts for birthdays and Christmas. They were often using such money not just to buy treats such as sweets, but to keep up a social life with their friends by paying for clothes and leisure activities.

Part-time employment

Some single parent children actively try to alleviate the negative effects of their family's restricted finances by taking on part-time employment in after-school hours and at weekends; although living in disadvantaged areas they can sometimes struggle to be successful in finding such employment. Shropshire and Middleton (1999) found that fewer lone-parent children had part-time jobs than children from two-parent families. However, Ridge (2002) identified many children not receiving pocket money as working part-time, including children below 13 years old, the legal age for child employment in the UK. The payment from such work frequently enables single parent children to pay for things denied to them by their parent, such as more fashionable clothes, leisure activities with friends, more shopping trips and sometimes school activities and equipment (Ridge, 2006). The money earned is a means by which children living in poverty can gain greater independence and socially engage with their friends through paying to participate in their shared activities. Sometimes a child's pay may also sustain the family's income, either through direct payments to the family budget, or allowing household money to be used for requirements other than their own (Ridge, 2002).

However, engaging in part-time work may also have negative repercussions for the children concerned. They can have less time to interact with their peers, and face tensions between the demands of school and work (Ridge, 2002). Children can also receive relatively low pay for their work. Shropshire and Middleton (1999) revealed that amongst children involved in part-time work, those living in lone-parent families worked for longer hours and for lower rates of pay than children from two-parent families.

Child protection and development

The issue of child protection has long been prominent within England, with the structure and organisation of services to safeguard children dictated by core legislation, guidance and policy. Mayall (2006) suggest that policy makers “still focus on protection as the guiding light for relations between the generations...and to some extent of providing support services for children” (p. 202). For Mayall, the focus on the principles of protection as the drivers of child-related policy (together with patriarchy and social class divide), acts as a barrier to a full recognition of children as citizens.

Shortcomings when working to safeguard and promote children’s welfare were brought into the spotlight once again with the death of Victoria Climbié (www.victoria-climbie-inquiry.org.uk) and the subsequent inquiry, revealed themes identified by past inquiries that resulted in a failure to intervene early enough into the lives of vulnerable children and young people. The Government’s response to the Victoria Climbié inquiry report and the first joint Chief Inspectors’ Report (2002) identified the key features of an effective system to safeguard children. These informed the Green Paper, “Every Child Matters” (2004) and the “Children Act 2004”, in particular the plans for integration of services around the needs of children, building on the principles set out in the Children Act 1989 (1991). “Every Child Matter” is the cornerstone in leading the direction of services for children, young people and their families and carers and in guiding and informing the practice of professionals. It is described as a new approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19, acknowledging the need to ensure that all children deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This is set this out in five outcomes that are identified as key to children and young people’s wellbeing: stay safe; be healthy; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution and to achieve economic wellbeing. “Every Child Matters” states that to achieve this, children need to feel loved and valued, and be supported by a network of reliable and affectionate relationships. If they are denied the opportunity and support they need to achieve these outcomes, children are at increased risk not only of an impoverished childhood, but also of disadvantage and social exclusion in adulthood, with abuse and neglect identified as pose particular problems (32).

“Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children” (DfES, 2006), sets out how individuals

and organizations should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) are designed to help ensure that this happens and includes local authorities, health bodies, the police and others. The objective of LSCBs is to coordinate and to ensure the effectiveness of their member agencies in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. “Working Together” acknowledges that there are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes harm. Whilst there is a section on the protection of the welfare of specific groups of children, for example children with a disability, children who live with domestic violence, children who are the victims of race and racism, there are no specific references to children living in single parent households. The document does recognise that one factor that can impact on long-term impairment is living in family and social circumstances where their health and development are neglected. Further in the identification of harm a number of factors have to be considered including the child’s development within the context of their family and wider environment. Those working with children should be informed by developmental perspectives and should be based on a clear assessment of the child’s developmental progress and the difficulties a child may be experiencing. Planned action should also be timely and appropriate for the child’s age and stage of development (100). The document outlines the fact that many of the families who seek help for their children, or about whom others raise concerns about a child’s welfare, are multiply disadvantaged. These families may face chronic poverty, social isolation, racism, and the problems associated with living in disadvantaged areas, such as high crime rates, poor housing, childcare, transport and education services, and limited employment opportunities. (185). Poverty is a significant contributor to this associated with the fact that children may unsuitable accommodation, have poor diets, health problems or disability, lacking ready access to good educational and leisure opportunities. Further social exclusion can also have an indirect effect on children, through its association with factors such as parental depression and long-term physical health problems.

The “Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families” (Department of Health, 2000) is intended to provide a framework for an in-depth understanding of the needs of children and their families. It is framed around three dimensions- child development needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors. The intention is that early identification of need should be identified through the “Common Assessment Framework for Children and Young People (2006)

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/caf) is a standardized approach to conducting an assessment of a child's needs examining the same dimensions identified within the framework. The expectation is that the majority of common assessments will be undertaken or arranged by practitioners in universal services such as early years settings (for example children's centres), schools and health settings.

The area of child protection is probably one of the most researched areas of all child care social issues. An early publication by the Department of Health, "The Children Act Now" (2001) summarises the finding of 24 projects. It notes amongst its indices of deprivation the high level of single parent families, between a third and a half in eight of the studies. Findings such as these promoted a shift towards more preventative work in the community, for example SureStart and Children's Fund initiative, with evaluation being built into these projects. As Corby (1996: 82-83) points out that little of this research is focussed on measuring effectiveness, focussing largely on the how the processes work rather than on what measures, strategies and initiatives work best. A number of studies focus on the working of the child protection 'system' (recent examples include Devaney (2004); Spratt and Callan, (2004); Cleaver and Walker (2004)). There is evidence that the issues of poverty and social exclusion, especially multiple disadvantage, are linked to issues of child protection (for example, Statham and Holtermann, (2004). However no specific study could be identified that examines the specific experiences of children and young people from single parent families.

Children's experiences of education

Over the decades, children's and adolescents' behaviour has been studied in order to examine its association with family structure as well as other mediating variables. In these studies, there is a tendency to find differences which show that children from single parent homes have more behaviour (externalizing) problems as well as internalizing problems like depression and/or anxiety. However, when other variables are controlled these effects appear to be smaller.

Amato and Keith (1991) carried out a meta-analysis of 92 studies and found that overall children and adolescents from divorced, single mother families are more likely to engage in externalizing, aggressive, noncompliant and deviant behaviour than children from married, two-parent families. These externalizing problems were the strongest effect shown among other aspects of wellbeing, yet the effect size is only about one-third of a deviation unit. The authors compared theoretical perspectives, which may have mediated for the effect such as the parental absence perspective, the economic disadvantage perspective and the family conflict perspective. They found support for all three perspectives among the studies reviewed, but the strongest support was for the family conflict perspective. In fact, family conflict is found to precede separation and divorce and disrupted parenting practices are present from that earlier period. Interaction among the still married spouses (i.e., before they split) shows poor problem-solving skills, escalation and reciprocation of negative affect, contempt, withdrawal, denial and negative attributions about their spouse's behaviour. The mothers' parenting practices are at that time affected by irritability, negativity, and less warmth (Gottman 1993; Hetherington 1999). Inter-parental conflict which involves the child and which is physically violent, threatening, or abusive as well as conflict where the child feels caught in the middle, has the most adverse consequences on the child (Hetherington 1999). Hetherington (2003) confessed that when he began studying divorce, he focused on the deleterious consequences, using a pathogenic model of divorce. But after 35 years of studying the subject, he admits that he is not impressed by an inevitability of adverse outcomes, but by a diversity of adjustment in parents and children in response to marital dissolution.

Hetherington (2003), based on three separate studies and having composite measures of "parent-child conflict", "parental warmth" or "control", "child anti-social behaviour"

and multiple sources of reports and ratings as more reliable measures, makes various points such as: the largest and most consistent effects on children's adjustment from marital transitions are in the domain of externalizing behaviour (increased aggression, non-compliance, conduct disorder, disobedience, poorer classroom conduct), social responsibility and academic and economic attainment. Internalizing problems (e.g., depression and anxiety) and lower self-esteem tend to be weaker. Although children and adolescents from divorced and remarried families compared to those from non-divorced families are at increased risk for psychological and behavioral problems, continues Hetherington, resilience is the normative outcome for children who are faced with the stresses and adaptive challenges associated with their parents' marital transitions. The vast majority of children are able to cope with their new life situations and eventually emerge as responsible, competent, well-adjusted adults.

McMunn *et al* (2001) studied the behaviour problems of children using Achenbach and Rutter scales for hyperactivity, emotional problems, conduct problems, peer problems and social behaviour, with a wide sample from previous British surveys. They found that when socioeconomic status is taken into account, the effect of lone motherhood on child psychological status is removed. "Neither never married nor previously married lone mother families display a strong or significant relationship once socio-economic factors are introduced." Poverty seems to be associated with children's high score on the problem behaviour questionnaires, one possibility being that poverty is associated with parental psychological distress. Only children from "reconstituted families" (including a step-parent) remained more likely to have a high score on the problem questionnaires, even after socioeconomic factors were included. It must be taken into account that it was not possible to know the association of the effect of reconstituted families with previous marriage or divorce or both. In the same study, single mothers' children present a risk, before the socioeconomic factors are included, but single fathers' children do not, something which can be possibly explained if one considers the better economic conditions of fathers (single mothers were significantly more likely to be living in poverty than single fathers in the sample). Finally, the mother's education explained some of the differences in children's scores on the behaviour questionnaires while a significant association was also found with parental mental health, even after including socioeconomic and other parental variables.

It is observed that in the case of adolescents it often happens that the teenager takes up more decision-making and has less control from his parent. There are both positive and negative effects of this, depending on parenting and the timing of the change in family processes. Authoritative parenting (response to child's needs, firm discipline, explanations and negotiation and fostering of independence), according to Baumrind (1991) are in a better position to negotiate with the adolescent a more independent role, so that this offspring becomes a competent and mentally healthy young adult. Non-authoritative parenting, according to (Hetherington 2003) is among the adverse conditions facing these families immediately after the separation. Problems in the mental health of the parents, high risk neighborhoods, inadequate schools and delinquent, low achieving peer groups are among the other adverse mediating circumstances. Expectancies on the part of the parents have been shown to be important predictors of children's outcomes. Academic performance was studied in this way by Parsons, Adler and Kaczala (1982) who showed that when there is an assumption in the culture that single parent families are disastrous and that they undermine our society, there are additional problems in these children (i.e., resulting from the low expectations of society) and ultimately low achievement in school.

Interaction between family structure, family income and other variables has also been examined and found important by Garis (1998) who showed that, although overall being an adolescent from a single parent family increases the risk for drug/alcohol problems and sexual activity for low income groups (income up to 20, 000 dollars per year) increasing family income of single parent families increased the likelihood that teenage children will have a drug and/or alcohol problem. This risk is reduced by higher religious activity in the family, higher parental oversight, and higher parental expectations. Whether the child lived with his mother or father did not make a significant difference here. Similarly, being married did not make a difference.

For the middle income group (between 20, 000 and 75, 000 dollars per year), however, living with the father reduced the risk of drug/alcohol problems. Also significant were oversight by parents, parental expectations for the child, and attendance of cultural events together by child and parent. For the high income group (income over 75, 000) dollars per year) the parents being married together was the strongest factor for reducing the risk for drug/alcohol problems. Parental oversight was also a factor which

significantly reduced the risk, but less important as compared to the case of the low income group.

The research also shows that relationships within the family vary. Hetherington (1991) found that girls form a close, supportive, companionate, and confiding relationship with their custodial mothers. However, in early adulthood there might be more conflict among daughter and mother. Custodial fathers have fewer problems of behaviour and discipline, but they communicate and self-disclose less openly with their children and are less competent in monitoring their children's activities, so sons may be more influenced by peer groups.

The knowledge that mothers and fathers have of their adolescents' daily activities has been studied as well as its links with adolescent adjustment. Waizenhofer *et al.* (2004) studying two-parent families, measured ways with which parents acquire knowledge from the children's daily activities and found that more of this knowledge (and specifically maternal knowledge) is a predictor of less deviance in adolescent behaviour. However, it did not predict depression or self-esteem. The study also showed that fathers acquired less information and they acquired it mainly through their spouses. The researchers speculate that it is possible that mothers' knowledge and involvement in the child/adolescent's daily activities allows them to intervene in ways that prevent deviant behaviour. Another explanation might be that adolescents who are open about their behaviour are less involved in deviant activities, or adolescents who know their mother is going to get the information abstain from such activities.

The role of extended family has also been investigated and in many cases found positive and important. From recent studies we refer to King *et al* (2000) who showed that there is positive influence from the presence of grandparents, which is enhanced in periods of stress in the family. At such times children confide in their grandparents their worries and concerns, and generally speaking the presence of grandparents is a protective factor in children's adjustment. There is also evidence that grandparents promote children's social-emotional adjustment if they are at risk. For example Werner and Smith (1982) reported that among their sample of at-risk children those classified as resilient were more likely to have a grandparent caregiver in the home or near-by. The researchers suggest that grandparents act as a protective factor against the negative effects of divorce, emphasizing the continuity, stability and support they provide.

Maternal grandparents were noted as more of a positive presence: For example, Lussier *et al* (2002) found that child-rated closeness to maternal grandparents was associated with fewer externalizing and internalizing problems. This did not always hold true with paternal grandparents. It held true for the total sample across family structure types and after controlling for other variables. The child's closeness to his/her maternal grandparents was linked to lower levels of internalizing and externalizing problems if the child lived with both biological parents or with a step-parent. If the child lived with a single mother, closeness to maternal grandparents was related to better adjustment while closeness to paternal grandparents was related to poorer adjustment.

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www.barnardos.org.uk

A charity providing services to children and express commitment towards establishing the means whereby perspectives and participation by children and young people are embedded in the way the organisation works.

www.byc.org.uk

An umbrella organisation in the UK for youth organisations, run by young people for young people.

www.changemakers.org.uk

A youth led learning programmes, grant schemes and volunteering initiatives stimulate enterprising minds, motivate active citizens and educate future leaders.

www.childrens-express.org

Children's Express is a UK-wide news agency producing news, features and comment by young people for everyone.

www.crae.org.uk

Promoting the status and lives of all children in England, through implementing the UNCRC.

www.the-childrens-society.org.uk

Work with children in over 100 projects covering children's participation.

www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn

An action plan to implement the government's core principles on involving children and young people.

www.everchildmatters.gov.uk

The government's strategic approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. to promote agencies and individuals to work together and to involve children and young people in more of a say about issues that affect them as individuals and collectively.

www.ncb.org.uk

The National Children's Bureau promote the interests and well being of all children across every aspect of their lives.

www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

New Deals for Communities is a major government initiative to tackle multiple deprivation in deprived communities. Local Strategic Partnership's are single, non-statutory, multi-agency partnerships matching a local authority boundary, which aim to bring together at a local level public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright

Hear by Right is a standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people.

www.participationworks.org.uk

An online gateway for information on children and young people participation giving access to policy practice, networks and information from across the UK.

www.surestart.gov.uk

Sure Start is the government programme to deliver the best start in life for every child. We bring together, early education, childcare, health and family support.

www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

This organisation aims to give the young people of the UK, between the age of 11 and 18 a voice, which will be heard and listened to by local and national government, providers of services for young people and other agencies who have an interest in the views and needs of young people.

www.young-voice.org

An apolitical organisation composed of representatives aged between 11-18 elected by their peers from across the UK.

National Reports

Cyprus National Report

By Spyros, S., Thoma, N., Antoniou, L., and Agathokleous, G.

CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1. General

- Cyprus must ensure that all its policies are in line with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children. In line with the Conventions' key articles, the State needs to ensure that children from single parent families are not discriminated against because of their family status, their best interests are taken into account, and that they are provided with opportunities to express their opinions on issues which affect them. The latter is a key provision of the Convention and is in line with the underlying philosophy of this project: children's perspectives need to be included in policy making because they are targets of these policies and they have the right to influence the shape and form they take.
- It is imperative that children's policies address the needs of children as a distinct group in society and not to subsume them in other categories like the family. Moreover, information which allows the state to monitor the wellbeing of children should be collected. Research on children's lives which provides them with an opportunity to express their perspectives should be prioritized when developing policies to combat child poverty and social exclusion.

1.2. Family Life

- Policy making needs to mainstream issues related to single parent families and present this family type as one of many possible family arrangements. Policy discourses need to move away from describing single parent families as exceptional or abnormal which often ends up stigmatizing the members of these families. Moreover, as the research has shown life in many single parent families continues in a normal fashion as in other kinds of family arrangements rather than in a dysfunctional manner as is often presented in public discourses. Policy makers need to promote new ways of addressing single parent families as families which are a possible outcome of the life course as well as families which contribute to society rather than being a burden.

- The research study has shown that the extended family plays a key role in supporting the single parent family financially, psychologically, and in other ways. Moreover, as the study has shown, for many children who spend a considerable amount of time with relatives there is a social understanding of the family which is much broader than the official definition which focuses on parents and children. Policy making needs to take into account the vital role played by the extended family in Cyprus, most notably through the role of grandparents, and expand its scope of eligible welfare recipients to include these key individuals who are very often directly and significantly implicated in child care for single parents families. This may be in the form of tax credits for these family members or more directly in the form of financial assistance. Given that grandparents are often retired and on a limited income, it is more imperative that their income is supplemented with financial support from the state which is after all relieved to some extent from providing public child care. Moreover, policies and programs should be aimed not simply at single parents but also at other members of the extended family that are implicated in child care and are often the primary child carers (e.g., training in childcare for grandparents, etc).
- It is important for policy-makers to take into account the views of the members of single parent families which often contradict popular assumptions and misconceptions about the deterioration of family life following separation or divorce. As the research has shown, for some families the transition from a two parent to a single parent family is a welcomed change if that brings an end to violence or intense conflict in the family.
- The process of separation and divorce is often a traumatic period for both parents and children. Policies which promote the institution of family mediation can go a long way in making the transition from a two parent family to a single parent family much smoother and psychologically more bearable for family members. The negative effects on children from parental conflict can be ameliorated when parents receive mediation services and are able to resolve their differences peacefully.

- Many single parents and children who face poverty refer to both the financial aspect of poverty as well as the time aspect. Time poverty is a principal problem faced by many single parent families where the parents are struggling to provide for their families financially only to find out that they do not spend enough time with their children. Policy making therefore needs to address time poverty in ways which provide single parents with more opportunities to spend time with their children. Flexible and part-time employment should be provided as viable options for single parent families, however, the state needs to ensure that such jobs are not deprived of the full benefits of employment and of parity.
- Accessible and affordable child care is a demand of many single parent families who find themselves trapped between the need to work and provide financially for their families and the demands of child care which is often either inaccessible or very expensive. To provide for accessible and affordable child care, the state needs to invest in child care facilities in local communities and subsidize the cost for single parent families in need.
- Policies need to take into account the different types of single parent families (e.g., separated, divorced, widowed, unmarried, etc) so that they can more effectively target them with specific programs.
- For many single parent families transportation is a major problem. Policies which allow for the subsidization of single parent families' transportation costs can relieve these families from the additional financial cost and potentially the time commitment often required by the single parent who needs to take his/her children around.
- Like other socio-economically disadvantaged segments of the population, single parent families should be provided with free or subsidized health care depending on need.
- At the psychological level, one of the key concerns of many children from single parent families is the limited time they spend with the absent parent, who in the majority of cases happens to be the father. In designing policies that address children's needs for contact with both parents, programs which address

parenting and parental responsibilities or mediation programs during the process of a divorce as well as general access to professional help and support can provide parents with the means to play a more important role in their children's lives whether they live with their children or not.

1.3. School Life

- Misunderstandings, lack of sensitivity, covert, and occasionally overt stigmatization, prejudice and discrimination at school occasionally give rise to a sense of social exclusion for poor children who come from single parent families. Though children, in general, do not find that other children treat them badly or unfairly because of their family status, the few cases that they experience are sometimes enough to create a sense of difference and exclusion. Educational policy makers should design programs which address the potential conflicts and misunderstandings which may arise in school among children or between teachers and children.
- Teachers in the study were very clear about the lack of proper training in how to handle children who come from single parent families. Lacking a proper framework to explain the behavior and academic performance of children from single parent families, teachers sometimes make unwarranted assumptions about these children. Educational policies need to integrate in the basic training of teachers as well as in the further training they receive once employed the subjects of family diversity, poverty, and social exclusion and their relationship to children's education.
- Given that many children from single parent families who have received support from their teachers, both academic and emotional support, are very satisfied with the support they received it is recommended that educational policies devise programs that allow teachers to provide further academic support to children who face learning difficulties and who are emotionally vulnerable. To equip teachers to provide basic emotional support, proper training should be offered to them including training in ethics to ensure that they are sensitized to issues of privacy and confidentiality, issues which the children in our study identified as

critical in their recommendations. Teaching hours reduction for teachers who can play this role is a good way to address this need.

- Given the new social realities regarding family diversity it is critical that the curriculum adequately reflects these realities, providing teachers with opportunities to address family diversity in an educationally informed manner that takes into account both the local and international changes which are taking place. Curriculum guides and textbooks need to be revised with these changes in mind to reflect the contemporary social realities of Cypriot society. Similarly, other educational materials should be developed and made available to teachers to allow them to draw on in order to effectively address family diversity in the classroom.
- Many of the children are highly suspicious of professional psychological help. One of their key concerns is that they will not receive real help for their problems and that they might end up being stigmatized. Policy making needs to devise educational programs which inform children about the benefits of getting professional psychological help when they need it and normalize it to the extent possible so that it becomes an acceptable option for children who need it. At the same time, educational policies need to take into account children's suggestions for providing psychological services which are easily accessible by children but at the same time are discrete so that children do not feel that they are stigmatized.

1.4. Financial Issues

- Given the widely used practice of sending children for extra lessons, many single parents feel that their children are at a disadvantage if they are unable to send them for extra lessons for financial reasons. Policies should include economically needy single parent families in the groups that benefit from subsidized fees when attending public educational institutes that provide extra lessons.
- Many single parent families face serious problems with housing including the high costs for renting or buying a house or the inadequate space in the house.

Policies which provide for housing subsidies based on need should be further supported while lower-rate housing loans should be made available to single parent families. One of the principal ways by which many children from single parent families experience inequalities is through their houses. Many children, experience the lack of space in their homes as a major disadvantage in their upbringing. Policies need to take into account the housing needs of single parent families and provide such allowances which enable single parent families to live under proper housing circumstances.

- Many children from single parent families feel uncertain about their educational futures because of the high costs of education. Policies need to take into account the financial difficulties experienced by many single parent families and offer the children from these families a more generous benefits package in line with the help provided to other family types such as the large families.
- The financial difficulties faced by many single parent families may lead them below the poverty line with all associated consequences brought about by social exclusion. Policies should ensure a minimum income for all single parent families according to family size and provide these families with appropriate tax relief to supplement their income.
- Programs which offer single parents opportunities for full or part-time employment should form the core of policy efforts to support single parent families. Policies, however, need to ensure the multiple demands placed upon single parents and the often resulting problem of time poverty are balanced with the benefits accruing from employment.
- One of the most serious problems faced by divorced families involves the delays or unwillingness of the absent parent to provide the maintenance fee for supporting the children. As a result many single parents end up resorting to legal measures or simply giving up. A policy which guarantees the monthly maintenance fee to all single parent families by the state and which makes the state responsible for collecting the fee from the absent parents will address more effectively this problem which often makes many single parents desperate. Similarly, the State should take the responsibility of guaranteeing the continued

support of the absent parent after a child becomes an adult (without the child needing to resort to legal measures) provided that he/she is still dependent on the single parent family (e.g., soldiers, university students, etc).

- Many children from single parent families become aware of their social exclusion when they are unable to participate in the activities of their friends and peers for financial reasons. Policies that provide needy children from single parent families with subsidized entertainment can be implemented to combat the social exclusion experienced by children.

1.5. Support

- Though children are in general prejudiced against the use of professional psychological support, those who do use such help find it very useful and recommend easier access to such services and in ways that avoid their stigmatization. Moreover, children recommend the use of free or low-cost psychological support services. Policies should take into account the needs of local communities and provide such support services where children can have easy access to them. Policies should also take into account alternatives to the traditional psychological support and provide options for children to get support from those they are more likely to trust (e.g., develop peer support groups in schools or the local community).
- The Educational Psychology Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture is severely understaffed and as a result there are long delays in service delivery. These services, given their critical role in addressing children's psychological needs, need to be properly staffed with properly trained professional psychologists who can respond quickly to the children's needs.
- Single parenthood presents particular challenges for single parents who are faced with multiple demands. Policy makers should devise parental training seminars to help single parents and absent parents to undertake more effectively their new roles.

- The support services provided to single parent families need to be staffed by highly qualified professionals who are trained in handling the particularities of single parent families. Policies should therefore incorporate training of professionals on issues of family diversity.
- Support services need to be better coordinated to be more effective in addressing the needs of single parent families. Policies should facilitate the coordination of these services by providing mechanisms for better communication and exchange of information among the various services involved.

1.6. Social Relations

- Opportunities for affordable leisure activities are limited for children from single parent families especially for those residing in rural areas. Local governments need to invest in providing community-based resources for children. Policies that provide for safe spaces for children to play, interact with one another, and engage in leisure activities will further help the integration of poor children from single parent families who otherwise might experience social exclusion in relation to leisure and entertainment which is often costly.

1.7. School Texts

- Educational policy makers should make sure that school texts and readings include examples of contemporary families functioning in modern ways (e.g., mothers working, fathers helping with housework and being affectionate and sensitive, etc). Single parent families, apart from bereaved families, should also be presented in school texts reflecting the existing realities. This can help integrate children from single parent families better in schools.

1.8. School Practices and Procedures

- School procedures and practices should take into account the particularities of single parent families and be sensitive to their needs. Educational policies need to review all current practices and ensure that they conform to the realities faced by single parent families and not simply those of two parent families (e.g., school letters should be addressed to guardians and not to Mr or Mrs, etc).

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1. Aims of the Research

Given their socially vulnerable positions in society, children are often disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion; focusing on them brings out a much-neglected aspect of our knowledge about, and understanding of, single parent families. This study makes children its primary focus but also incorporates the perspectives of those others who are significant in their everyday worlds. The key questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. How do the children of single parent families experience and understand their daily lives as members of these families. More specifically, how do they understand, experience, and cope with poverty and the multiple forms of social exclusion they face including stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion from certain kinds of social relations and contexts?
2. How do these children perceive the current support and services available to them as they relate to family (including the immediate and extended family), peers, school, community, health and social services, what resources do they draw on for support, and what kinds of support (both formal and informal) do they wish they had?
3. How do other groups in society which come into direct contact with these children (e.g., their peers and their parents, their teachers and other school-related professionals, and community, health, and social service providers view them and their families?

A second major area of research investigation comprises the educational system and how this interacts with community, health and social services in facilitating the social inclusion of single parent families or alternatively their exclusion from society. The project analyzes the existing curriculum to identify how the notion of family is treated and makes recommendations for changes. Our investigation also focuses on school practices and procedures which result in the social exclusion and stigmatization of children from single parent families.

2.2. Research Structure

In line with our agreed upon cross-national, comparative qualitative research design the methodological approach adopted in Cyprus was the same one used in the UK and Greece. More specifically, the team used semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups to explore issues related to poverty and social exclusion with children from single parent families while focus group discussions were used with single parents. Focus group discussions were also used with children and parents from two parent families to provide for a comparative basis of the experiences reported and in order to explore how these families view single parent families. Focus group discussions were also carried out with teachers while in-depth interviews were carried out with school principals and other school-related professionals such as school councillors, psychologists, and social workers.

Most interviews took place in children's homes. Researchers tried to discourage the presence of others during the interview process in order to avoid a situation where children would censor themselves from what they had to say. Interviews took an average of 45 to 60 minutes while focus groups ranged from 50 to 90 minutes. The semi-structured interview approach allowed researchers to explore key issues related to poverty and social exclusion and hence provided a basis for cross-national comparability; however, it also provided them with enough flexibility to pursue issues and concerns that the interviewees' had. All interviewees were provided with several opportunities to expand on their thoughts and ideas and to address issues not raised by the researcher.

Interviews and focus group discussions were tape recorded (with a few exceptions), transcribed, coded and analyzed. Analysis focused on the major areas of investigation included in our research design with a special sensitivity to the emerging themes and the particularities of each national context.

Our approach also included an in-depth qualitative content analysis of the existing curriculum (including curriculum guides and textbooks) for elementary and secondary school to identify how the notion of the family is treated and to provide recommendations for changes. Finally, our investigation included a review of school practices and procedures to identify any such practices and procedures which might

result in the social exclusion and stigmatization of children from single parent families who live in poverty. School practices and procedures were investigated through on-site visits and observation (in addition to the use of interviews with professionals) and recommendations for changes are suggested.

2.3. Sampling and Access

Our sample included children from both single parent and two parent families ages 6 to 16 balanced in terms of age, gender, class, and geographical location (including urban and rural). Our sample of children from single parent families included all major subcategories of this group, namely, children from divorced, separated, unmarried, and widowed families. More specifically, the in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups carried out were as follows:

1. Children of single parent families (40 in-depth interviews and 4 focus groups):
2. Single parents: (4 focus groups)
3. Children of two parent families (4 focus groups)
4. Parents of two parent families (4 focus groups)
5. Teachers and other school-related professionals, e.g., school counsellors, psychologists, social workers, etc (4 focus groups with teachers and 10 in-depth interviews with professionals).

Though our sample included children from different socio-economic backgrounds, given the aims of the project, that is to explore issues of poverty and social exclusion, we included in our sample children and parents who came primarily from economically underprivileged areas. Two districts, Nicosia and Limassol, were the largest areas from which our sample (both the urban and rural) was selected. These two districts were chosen because they have the largest concentration of single parent families. Within these two districts, a number of communities/ municipalities and their associated schools (both primary and secondary) were selected. As stated above, special effort was made to include underprivileged communities. Where our access to individuals was limited, the area was expanded to include neighboring communities/ municipalities.

Our initial contacts were made through the membership of the *Pancyprian Association of Single Parents and Friends*, our partner organization in this project; however, in all cases, the sample selected in this way did not exceed 50% of the total sample to avoid biasing the overall sample with the characteristics of Association members. The

remaining of the sample was selected following a number of different strategies. In some areas, we requested the help of the Department of Social Welfare Services who contacted a number of single parent families and asked them whether they would be interested in participating in the study. Those families which responded positively were then asked to get in touch with the researchers who arranged for the interviews and focus group discussions. Another strategy for sample recruitment was to work through the schools. We have requested permission from the Ministry of Education and Culture to distribute invitation letters to all children in the schools selected. Children and their families were asked to respond as to whether they would like to participate in the research. Those who responded positively were asked to provide us with their contact details which then allowed us to contact them and arrange for interviews and focus group discussions. Finally, snowballing was used to some extent, especially in cases where we needed particular types of single parent families which are represented in small numbers in the overall population (e.g., single parent families headed by fathers). Selecting the rural sample was more difficult than selecting the urban sample mainly because of the smaller numbers of single parent families which live in rural areas.

2.4. Ethical Issues

All children who participated in the project were asked to provide their consent after being thoroughly briefed about the project. Parental consent was also required of all children. Where parental consent was provided but not the child's consent, the latter's wishes were respected. Where children wanted to participate in the research but their parents did not provide their consent, the parent's wishes were respected. In all cases, children were asked to provide their own consent irrespective of their parent's positive response. All parents who provided their consent to their children's participation in the study provided it in writing.

Consent forms provided potential research participants with information on the general aims of the research and explained how the project would ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. More specifically, consent forms explained that no real names would be used in any of the reports or publications arising from the project and that though the interviews would be recorded for purposes of analysis all data would be kept confidential. Children, given their non-adult status, were informed that as the law requires, if during the interview they disclosed any information which suggested

that they or another person is at risk of harm, it might be necessary to share this information with an adult who can help, but that this would be done only after a discussion with the child as to how and with whom the information would be shared. Finally, children were also informed that they can withdraw from the interview at any point they wish without any negative consequences.

To ensure informed consent all children were provided with leaflets which explained the research, its aims, the procedures to be followed and the participant's rights as well as issues related to anonymity and confidentiality. Information on how the research findings would be utilized was also provided. For older children (ages 11-16) a leaflet including the information outlined above was provided while for younger children (ages 6-11) a more developmentally appropriate set of materials was prepared to ensure adequate comprehension. Three different handouts were prepared for younger children. The first one titled "Can you help us with our project?" was given to children before the interview date in order to adequately inform them about the project and to help them think as to whether they wanted to participate in it or not. The handout described what the project is about, who the researchers are and what they want from the children, what the researchers would do with the information collected, and what the child has to do if he or she is interested in participating (i.e., letting their parent(s) know). Two versions (one for the child, the other for the researcher) of another handout were also prepared and used by the researcher and the child before the interview to ensure that the child fully understood what was about to happen. This handout included information that once again allowed children to reach informed consent but also allowed the researcher to clarify any questions which the child might have before beginning the interview. A final handout which was given to the children at the end of the interview informed them about the steps that would follow until the completion of the project and how the results would be utilized. Children were also informed that the results would be provided to them through a number of events that the project planned to organize.

CHAPTER 3: POLICY REVIEW

3.1. Statistical Review of Single Parent Families in Cyprus

According to the *Demographic Report, 2004* of the Republic of Cyprus, the fertility rate in 2004 in the Government controlled area is estimated to be 1.49 which suggests a continuous decline over time (2.46 in the period 1982-85, 1.74 in the period 1997-2000 and 1.51 in the period 2001-2004). Since 1996, the total fertility remains below the replacement level of 2.10. Extra-marital births in 2004 were only 276 or 3.3% of the total number of births and remains the lowest proportion of extra-marital births in the European Union. The fertility rate here suggests that the size of the Cypriot families is in decline too; the households are becoming smaller and different types of households are emerging. The average household size in 2001 was 3.06 whereas in 1976 it was 3.95. Below is an analytical table of the size of Cypriot households for the years 1976, 1982, 1992 and 2001.

Households by size and percentage of single parent families

Size of the Household	1976 %	1982 %	1992 %	2001 %
1 person	8,6	10,0	12,6	16,0
2 persons	18,9	21,7	24,8	27,2
3 persons	15,6	17,3	17,4	17,1
4 persons	21,4	25,6	25,5	21,9
5 persons	16,3	15,2	13,8	11,8
6 persons and over	19,2	10,2	5,9	6,0
Average Household size	3,95	3,51	3,23	3,06
% Single parent families to total number of households	3,6	4,2	5,7 (5,0 mother with children, and 0,7 father with children)

Source: Demographic Report 2004, Statistical Service, Report No 42, p. 42

It is worth noting that the percentages of single parent families, as they appear in the table above, reveal a constant increase of single-parenthood on the island. Despite the fact that single parent families constitute a small percentage of all families, there is a significant increase (i.e., compare 3.6% in 1982 with 5.7% in 2001). It is also important to note that it is mothers who head the greatest percentage of single parent families (5% versus 0.7% in 2001). According to the 2001 Census Report the number of widowed individuals is 31,927, out of which 6,123 are men and 25,804 are women while the number of divorced individuals reached 14,135 or 2% of the total population (Population Census, 2001, p.29).

Given that women are more likely to experience unemployment and to receive lower salaries than men and given that 65% of those living under the poverty level are women (Statistical Report, 1996-7), it is likely that an increasing number of children living in single parent families headed by women will experience poverty. In 2001, the risk-of-poverty rate for single-parent households (with at least one child) was 41% while for two-parent households with one dependent child the rate was only 6% (European Communities, 2004, p.182). Out of the total number of 12,315 single-mothers, 6,748 single-mothers are economic active while 5,567 are economic inactive. The number of economically active single-fathers is 972 while the number of inactive ones is 737 (Statistical Services, Population Census, 2001).

For 2004, the number of divorces was 1,614 or 2.2 per thousand people. The greatest percentage of divorced couples (50.1%) reported no dependent children under the age of 18, 26.5% reported one, 17.8% two, and 5.2% three or more dependent children. This indicates, along with the remarriage patterns, how family forms in Cyprus are becoming more and more complicated for both adults and children. The table below provides data on divorce in Cyprus for selected years.

Divorces and Divorces Rates, 1974-2004

Year	Total divorces	% change over previous year	Crude divorce rate	Total divorce rate
1974	140	12,0	0,27
1983	262	21,3	0,50	65,0
1994	555	10,1	0,87	112,6

2001	1,197	1,3	1,71	203,7
2004	1,614	9,6	2,19	246,4

Source: Demographic Report 2004, Statistical Service, Report No 42, p. 135

The Statistical Services, for the year 2004, breakdowns the grounds for divorce as follows: (1) irretrievable break-down of the marriage, (2) irretrievable break-down of the marriage due to 5 years of separation, and (3) desertion. The greatest percentage is attributed to irretrievable break-down of the marriage (1,439 out of a total of 1,614 divorces) (Demographic Report, 2004, p.144). It seems that the vast majority of divorces (1,293 out of 1,614 in 2004) were issued in urban than rural areas. In Nicosia for example, during 2004, 493 divorces were issued in urban areas versus 92 in rural areas. Most of the divorces, during the same year, were issued against men rather than women (648 against men, 518 against women, and 448 against both partners) (Demographic Report, 2004, pp. 145,148).

3.2. Legislation

The following is an overview of the legislative framework which directly or indirectly relates to children and their families and which can improve an understanding of the overall context in which the lives of children from single parent families are regulated by law in Cyprus.

The *Relation of Parents and Children's Law (216/1990)* regulates parents' and children's relations including legal, personal, and moral issues. Parents are eligible to determine the names of the children, to care for their children, to manage their children's property, and to represent their children in every case or legal act that concerns children. The inability of a parent to take care of children because of a death, disappearance, or absence gives the right to the other parent to exercise parental care.

The Law gives the right to children to be heard in decisions that affect their interests. Based on their maturity, children's opinions, according to the Law, should be discussed and respected before any decisions around parental care are taken. The interest of the child should be also considered in judicial decisions that concern parental care. In addition, Article 12 of the Law 343/1990 that ratifies the U.N. Convention for the

Rights of the Child says that children should be heard, directly or through a representative or a pertinent organization, in any administrative or judicial process on issues that affect them.

In cases of divorce or cessation of a marriage, parental care is regulated by the court. In such cases, parental care may be provided to one or the other parent, to both parents, or to a commissioner. Article 16 regulates the parental care of children who are born out of wedlock. According to the article, parental care, in such cases, is assigned to the mother. In case the father recognizes legally the child, parental care is shared by both parents. Article 18 of the Law 343/1990 that ratifies the U.N. Convention for the Rights of the Child calls State Parties to make every possible effort to ensure that both parents have equal responsibility for their children's growth and development.

In addition, in cases of divorce, the absent parent has the right to communicate with his or her children. When there is a disagreement between parents, the court takes the decision in consideration of the interests of the child. In addition, Article 9 of the Law 343/1990 that ratifies the U.N. *Convention for the Rights of the Child* calls the State Parties to respect the right of the child who lives apart from both of his or her parents or from one of his or her parents to maintain personal relations and to contact them regularly unless this is against the interests of the child. Parental care, according to the Law, can be removed for the following reasons: (1) when the parent violates his or her rights for parental care, (2) when the parent misuses his or her right for parental care, (3) when the parent is not in a position to take care of the children, (4) after parents request as such for a good reason, and (5) when the parent has been convicted for offences related to children's life, health, or moral issues.

Additionally, the Law 343/1990 that ratifies the Convention of the Rights of the Child requests from States Parties to give information, after request, to children, parents or other family members if necessary, when the separation of the parents is due to the State's measures like detention, or imprisonment, or exile, or deportation, or death of both or one of the child's parents.

The *Property Relations Between Spouses Law (232/1991)* regulates children's maintenance after parental divorce. The spouse, after divorce, is entitled to legally demand maintenance for children from the other spouse. If it is necessary, maintenance

then may cease, increase, or decrease. Maintenance is measured according to the needs of the person that is entitled to and as these needs relate to his or her life circumstances.

Children's Law (213/1991)

According to the Children's Law (213/1991), a child who is born out of wedlock is entitled to receive his or her rights retrospectively since his or her birth, his or her legal status, and in general the same rights as a child who is born in a marriage if his or her parents marry afterwards or the child gets legal recognition voluntarily or judicially. According to Article 3 of Law 50/1979, fathers' legal recognition can be achieved voluntarily or judicially. The Law also makes clear that both parents are equally responsible for the child's maintenance. In addition, children born out of wedlock have full inheritance rights in their father's and mother's property or other family member's property as if he or she has been born within a marriage.

In 2006, the new Welfare Funds and Services Law were enacted introducing important changes aiming to improve the standard of living of welfare fund beneficiaries. One of the most important changes of the Law in relation to single parent families is the fact that it offers a more expanded definition of the single parent family including in this way a broader number of families entitled to receive welfare funds. Contrary to the 2003 Welfare Law's narrow definition of the single parent, the 2006 Law defines the single parent as the person with dependent children who is unmarried, widowed, divorced, separated, or the person whose husband or wife is in prison for at least one year or disappeared or deported by the Republic (p. 1083-4). For the first time, the law introduces the term unmarried parent and includes the divorced and the separated in its definition and those that have the responsibility for caring for those children whose parents disappeared.

Dependent children by law are considered all children under 18 years of age and those children over 18 who serve in the military or are studying in tertiary education and are dependent financially on their parents.

In short, welfare fund receivers qualify to receive extra funds for their personal needs or those of their dependent family members as follow: need for caring, need for clothing, need for household equipment or other special personal or social needs considering that these needs are not covered by other state funds. In addition, under certain

circumstances, welfare fund receivers are eligible for house rent, house repairs, space heating, payment of municipal or other taxes or financial help for repayment of privately owned houses.

Unemployed welfare fund receivers, their spouses, or cohabitants are eligible for funds for a period of twelve months after their employment in scale base as follow: full funds for the first four months after employment, two thirds of the eligible funds for the following four months, and one third of the eligible funds for the last four months.

3.3. The National Action Plan

The National Action Plan for Social Cohesion of the Cyprus Republic is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The Report on Strategies of Social Protection and Social Inclusion issued in 2006 gives the current conditions and progress made since 2003. More specifically:

- Participation in work was 72.4% for the general population, while for women it was 58.4%.
- Unemployment was 5.3%.
- Risk of poverty was 15% for the general population while for single parent families it was 22%. (In 1996-97, the figure for single parent families was 41% so there has been a significant improvement since then. However, a study of the University of Cyprus on inequality has shown that this group of the population has deteriorated on this domain between 2001 and 2003, when compared to the true mean income of the general population).
- The percentage of people who live in owned houses or living in houses for free was 91%.
- 87% of people living in poverty had an owned house.

The general strategy of the government aims, among others, to decrease the current inequality between men and women in terms of participation in the job market, and the general reinforcement of conditions for social cohesion. More specifically, the national strategy for social inclusion aims to decrease the percentage of those who live below the poverty line, to integrate vulnerable groups in the job market, and to prevent the social exclusion of children. Measures for realizing these aims include a focus on single

parent families (who have a high risk for poverty) as well as inclusion in the job market of vulnerable groups such as women and people who live on welfare allowance. The increase of employment opportunities will be partly promoted through professional and vocational training of members of the targeted groups. One specific programme funded by the European Social Fund to integrate new enterprises headed by women is already being implemented.

Other priorities of the NAP include:

- Increase of women's participation in the workforce. The NAP's aim is to raise women's participation from 58.5% to 63% by 2010.
- Increase the number of all-day schools which include preprimary, primary and secondary schools, some of which already work until afternoon hours.
- Prevent early dropout from school by children. (In economically and socially underprivileged areas, the system of Educational Priority Zones has been implemented and is already operating. For the schools included in these zones, more resources are used to offset the existing disadvantages and inadequacies, i.e., using a positive discrimination approach).

The accomplishment of the above objectives will be carried out with the co-operation of local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and government services. However, the problem, as Peristianis points out in a comment paper (2005), is that Cypriot practices are very centralized and local authorities have little opportunity to act. Other problems include limited funding and staffing something which limits the extent of their role. Peristianis specifically refers to single parent families who could benefit from appropriate legislation. He adds that young people and children would also be more empowered through the reinforcement of local and non-governmental programmes something which would allow them to take a more active role on issues of common concern affecting their lives.

Though single parent families are reported as only 2% of the general population for 2003, their risk for poverty is higher (22% rather than 15% which is rate for the general population); single parent families and children in particular are therefore a target group for the NAP in terms of preventing poverty and social exclusion.

3.4. Policies to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in Cyprus

Two of the key aims of the NAP are to increase the participation of women (and other vulnerable groups) in the work force, mainly through training and to prevent the social exclusion of children. The risk of poverty for the general population in Cyprus is 15% while for single parent families it is 22%. Hence, single parent families are a targeted group of the NAP.

Support for families in general is offered by the Department of Social Welfare Services which also manages allowances for low income people in general. However, social policy in Cyprus provides a number of specific allowances to poor individuals and families to relieve them from the stress of poverty. There is, for instance, a minimum allowance for respectable living for those with very low or no income: This allowance is 2,678 Cyprus pounds p.a. for a single person plus 1,339 for each child over 14 years of age, plus 709 p.a. for each child under 14 years of age. Additionally, there is an allowance for rent for those who do not own a house (if they do own a house, they are granted an allowance for repairs).

The percentage of people, according to the Report on Strategies, who live in owned houses or live in houses for free was 91%. People living in poverty had an owned house at a rate of 87%. A sum can be granted by the Department of Social Welfare Services for extensions or changes in an owned house, to make it more comfortable in those cases the family lives on welfare allowance.

In the case of single parent families, one may receive this benefit even if s/he is working since part of the earned income (150 pounds) is not taken into account. Moreover, single fathers are now also entitled to public allowances the same way as single mothers.

Policies also include health allowances for individuals and families who live in poverty. Free of charge health services are provided to individuals and families according to their income. For example, a two-member family with income under 18,000 Cyprus pounds enjoys free health care while a five-member family with income under 21,000 pounds is provided with free health care. The General Health System which is under way, will

incorporate existing public and private services for more comprehensive delivery of services.

Childcare for children 0-3 years is provided for infants and young children in day-care centres run and inspected by the Department of Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. In 2004-2005, 18% of children of this age benefited from the services of these day-care centres. For children between 3 years and 5 years 9 months of age, preprimary education is provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture in preprimary schools. Four-hundred and thirty three groups were in operation during 2005-2006 with four more added during the current school year.

National Policies in Relation to Children's Poverty and Social Exclusion

Cyprus, like the other EU members, stresses the importance of employment as an important way to prevent poverty. According to the National Action Plan, employment policy will address social exclusion through training, education and equal opportunities for women. For the most vulnerable groups, such as young workers and women with family obligations, the Plan proposes individual approach policies. The social protection initiatives include provisions for single parents such as the exemption of a part of income from work.

Child poverty, according to the Plan, is addressed through the role of the Social Welfare Services and the continuous upgrading and development of a range of services for prevention and treatment. The aim of the NAP is to reduce the risk of poverty among the general population of children to 11% by 2010. Prevention of children's social exclusion includes programmes of functional literacy for all children (already being implemented), training in information technology (provided at the secondary school level), and increase of children's participation in all-day schools. The NAP aims to prevent the early dropout from school through the modernization of apprenticeship training and of secondary vocational schools. Care for children aged 0-3 years is already being implemented with 18% of these children being cared for in nurseries administered by the Social Welfare Department. The Ministry of Education and Culture caters to older children and up to the age of 6 when they go to primary schools with the last year of pre-primary education now being compulsory.

For children with low achievement, systematic support is provided: at present 7.5% of students receive this help. Students with special needs are integrated in regular schools and supported by specialized personnel. The support provided to low achieving students and students with special needs would naturally be more effective in a system of mixed ability/mixed needs groups. Public schools in Cyprus have an official policy of mixed ability/mixed needs grouping (classes). In fact, however, as UNESCO Report (1997) points out, this is not effectively done because of various hindrances:

1. Teachers are not adequately trained to apply this policy in practice, so they address more “the average student”, as many teachers revealed to the UNESCO commissioners, or even, as some high school teachers said, they address “the high achieving students.”
2. A system of one year teachers training before appointment to a teaching job was proposed in the UNESCO Report, which was taken up by the Cyprus Government, but this is still in the first years of its implementation and only newly-placed teachers have benefited from it.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter 4.1: Family Life

4.1.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the everyday lives of children who belong to single parent families. More specifically, the chapter examines the time that children spend with their parents, the practical difficulties which families face everyday, the extracurricular activities of the children, what children from single parent families like or dislike, the perspective of single parents and children on how they are perceived by others, and their problems and suggestions on how to improve their family life. At the same time, the chapter compares the everyday lives of children who belong to single parent families with those who belong to two parent families. The information analyzed comes from what children and parents from single parent and two parent families said.

4.1.2. The Organization of Single Parent Families: Family Structures and Household Composition

As we can see from the participation of single parents and their children in the research, multiple types of single parent families exist. The factors that determine the type or form of a single parent family vary. Among these factors may be the gender of the parent with whom the child or children live, the economic status of the family, the parent's employment or the lack of it, the social environment of the family, the help that the single parent family receives from relatives, and the area where the family is located. On the one hand, this variation may mean that children and the parent who resides with them have different experiences in their everyday lives, different needs and problems, and different perceptions towards their lives in general.

On the other hand though, it doesn't mean that single parents and their children don't face common problems, concerns, and difficulties that make it difficult for their families to function smoothly and to be in a good psychological condition. For this reason, the complexity and the differentiation that characterize these families must be taken into consideration whenever attempts are made to comprehend how these families are structured and how they operate. This complexity and differentiation must also be taken into account when policy decisions are made, or suggestions towards the adoption of

policies for these families are made in order to implement actions that are characterized with the necessary sensitivity.

Most of the children who participated in the study belong to single parent families headed by mothers. These include cases of children from families where the father has died or, as is common in Cyprus, families where the parents have divorced and the custody of the children has been given to the mother (as is often the case). Most children from single parent families live and grow up in the same household as their mother, brothers and sisters. In a few exceptional cases, because of economic or other practical problems, there are single parent families who live in a household shared by other members of the extended family such as grandparents, uncles and aunts. In a few exceptional cases, children may live in a single parent family which is headed by the father. In the case of many single parent families, whether they are headed by the father or the mother, other members of the extended family such as grandfathers and grandmothers usually play an important role in the everyday life of the children and of the single parent family in general. This might be as a result of the single parent family's need for assistance, or because the single parent family resides near the homes of other members of the extended family, or even because some members of the extended family intentionally intervene in the affairs of the single parent family.

4.1.3. Life with One Parent: Children's Everyday life

The Problem of Time

One of the issues that was raised in our discussions with the parents from single and two parent families was the pace of life in modern society. The commitments of both parents and children prevent them from spending adequate quality time together and from doing things that they want to do as a family. More specifically, the time that parents spend at work, the time they devote for doing the house chores including the time they spend for cooking, together with the heavy homework demands of the children, the children's afternoon visits for extra lessons as well as their extracurricular and entertainment activities leaves a very limited time for family members to spend together. Many of the parents told us that they are being forced to adopt the role of the "taxi driver" in the afternoons, that is, spending a lot of time transporting their children from one activity to the next. This was more evident in families that lived in urban areas. From our focus group discussions with children and parents, it seems that family members spend the

limited time they have together at home. For example, the parents may help their children with their school work (especially in the case of the younger children), they might eat together, watch TV or DVDs, read books and sometimes they might play a game together like backgammon or another table game, an electronic game, or even an outdoor game such as basketball or football. Weekends are the time when families have the opportunity to spend some time together, to go on a day trip, to pay a visit to relatives or friends or to go to the beach during the summertime. Very often, however, as many children and parents stated they are not able to spend this kind of quality time together because of other social commitments (e.g., weddings, christenings, etc.).

For many single parents, the inadequate time they spend with their children is a major concern. They recognize that because of physical as well as psychological exhaustion they cannot offer their children what they need while their work schedules make it very difficult to spend enough time with their children. In the words of a 26 year old single mother, Sara, from urban Limassol:

I get out of work at 19:00. By the time I get home its 19:30. My baby [i.e., her child] goes to bed at 20:30 because she has to go to school the next day. Now that I work, I don't get to go home for lunch so I don't get to see my child at all. I only get to see her half an hour in the morning and one hour at night.

Nevertheless, some of the single parent families who live in rural areas mentioned that they sometimes neglect their work in order to spend some time with their children.

There are a few cases, however, where single mothers do not work outside the home and therefore do not face such problems. There are also cases of families (both single and two parent) where a parent works for the civil service and gets off work early in the afternoon and therefore is in a position to spend a satisfactory amount of time with the children. However, even in these cases, the children's overloaded schedules (e.g., school work, private lessons, extracurricular activities etc.) and have limited time to spend with their parents. On the other hand, the children whose parents work full days are often cared for by their grandparents when they are accessible and available. When grandparents or other relatives do not live near the family, the children (if they are older) usually stay at home by themselves until their parents return from work. Single parents usually stay in touch with their children during these times via the telephone.

Single parents also point out that their children as a result learn how to take care of themselves in the absence of the parent from home.

In our focus group discussions and interviews, many children who come from single parent families stated that they are in general satisfied with the time they spend with the parent they live with and they mentioned activities they engage in together as a family such as watching TV, going for walks, visiting relatives or going on day trips, and playing table games. Nevertheless, many children referred to their parents' lack of time and tiredness when they come home from work and said that they would like to spend more time with them. As Lenia, a 14 year old girl, from urban Limassol, pointed out in an interview,

Basically, I don't spend so much time with her [i.e., her mother], because now she has to go to court, she also has to work and she needs time to rest.... I would like to spend more time with her, but because I can't, I cannot do anything about this.

Susana, a seven year old girl, from urban Limassol similarly expressed her wish to have more time with her mother:

We have enough time together . . . but I want to spend more time with her because she doesn't give me enough attention. Why can't I be with her all the time?

In general, children expressed their desire for more time together with their single parents in order to engage in common activities. Some children, for example, wanted more time in order to play with their parents. As Thanos, a 10 year old boy from urban Nicosia, put it: "I know that my father is tired when he comes home from work but I want to play football with him." Others wanted more time in order to shop together or to go for a swim to the beach.

Nevertheless, and despite their wish for spending more time together, some children do recognize the limitations that their parents face and the benefits that accrue from working long hours. A 14 year old boy from urban Limassol, Cyrus, for instance, said that he does not mind the fact that his mother is mostly absent from the home because he knows that this means more financial stability for the family. In his own words:

I don't mind that she spends more time at work though I know it's very tiring for her, but later on we get to have more money, we are not going to have to limit ourselves in relation to the things we need. This is better for me.

On the other hand, most of the children that come from single parent families--divorced, separated, or unmarried--express their dissatisfaction about the limited time they spend with their absent parent. Some of the children say that they only get to spend the weekends with their absent parent (who is usually the father) whilst other children see their absent parent more frequently (two or three times a week). When the children meet with their father they usually go for a walk or eat together but rarely play together. In general, it is safe to say that most children miss their absent parent and eagerly await for the next time to meet. A number of children, however, do not have a relationship with the absent parent and do not wish for one mainly because of what they might have experienced in the family before separation or divorce (e.g., domestic violence).

In general, children who come from single parent families feel that they live a normal life like all other children but are experiencing deprivations and some small difficulties with their parents. Some children are not happy with the fact that they have to live with one of their parents only – and however, many of them recognize that their parents have difficulties in living together. Many children [wish for their parents to live again together]. Those children who are going through a transitional phase (e.g., through a process of divorce) experience more intensely the absence of one of the parents. In those cases where the relationship between the parents is good following divorce or separation things seem to be somewhat better for the children.

In general, children from single parent families say that they have good relations with their parents and siblings. The children feel that they are supported by the parent they live with and they realize the practical difficulties that limit the time they spend with them. As Sophia, a 16 year old girl from urban Limassol, explains in a focus group: “When you have only one parent who is forced to work extra hours, you end up losing touch.” Children feel that their parents do everything they can in order to provide them with all they need, but they also recognize that the most important thing is for them and their families to be well rather than having all the material goods they want. Nevertheless, children point out that the economic aspect is frequently the reason they come in conflict with their parents. What bothers some children is the father who is absent and who is not fulfilling his financial obligations towards the family. Susana, a

seven year old girl from urban Limassol who was asked to explain what bothers her as a result of living with just her mother, expressed her disappointment for this fact and for the fact that her mother does not pay enough attention to her. More specifically, she said: “I mind that my mother has to go to work, I stay with my grandmother, when she comes from work she picks me up, then she goes to sleep, I need her to give me a lot of attention.”

Most of the children who belong to single parent families go to their single parents when they need help with their school work. Many children ask help from their siblings, uncles/aunts, and grandparents while the children who attend child care centers get help from the attendant teachers. Only a few children said that they do not need any help with their school work. Interestingly, an 11 year old boy from rural Nicosia, Nino, mentioned that when he needs help from his mother she is not able to help him because she is busy with house work and the younger children in the family. In his own words: “For example, my mother does her chores and helps the younger children with their school work. She can’t help me with my school work and I have to do it by myself.” This is in line with what many single parents say. The majority state that they help their children with their school work or that they pay an instructor to provide them with such help. Nevertheless, some single parents say that it is difficult for them to help their children with school work when they need it. As a single mother explained: “Having three children sharing the same common space [in the house] it is impossible”. Similarly, a single father explained what he has to face in relation to this: “It is extremely difficult because I have a very tight schedule. I have to cook, to do other things, to help him with his school work and somewhere all these things get mixed up. It is tough.”

In focus group discussions, the children from two parent families stated that they are satisfied with the help they get with their school work from their parents. This help, according to the children, comes from either the father or the mother or in many situations from both depending on what they are doing and what responsibilities they have during the time that their children study.

Many of the children receive help during exams or test periods from relatives such as uncles and aunts who are academics or who have some knowledge on the subjects that the children need help with. A number of children said that they pay for professional

help with those subjects that they face difficulties with. What is quite common is a combination of help provided by parents, relatives and professionals. The younger children who participated in the focus group discussions mentioned that they usually get help for their school work from their older brothers or sisters something which was often corroborated by their older siblings.

Many parents from nuclear families provide help with school work to their children. Most parents explained that their children mostly study on their own and they, as parents, check on their homework once they are finished. In general, parents provide more help to their younger children than the older ones. It seems that mothers are the ones who mainly help the children with their school work while fathers are the ones who usually check on the homework once it is completed. Most of the children who came from urban Nicosia attend child care centers where they often study their homework. When they return home, their parents address any questions that the children may have and check to see if they have studied their homework.

Daily Activities: Work and Leisure in the Family

In their everyday life children from single and two parent families are occupied with their school work, attending extra lessons, playing, and watching TV. The extracurricular activities of many children revolve around extra lessons which they attend after school. These include foreign languages, computers, or other supporting classes. Some children also take ballet, swimming, painting, or martial arts classes or take classes on how to play a musical instrument like the piano or the guitar. Other children, mostly boys, are engaged in sports like track and football. Besides their organized extracurricular activities children also exchange visits with their friends and play in their neighbourhoods and in parks which are close to their homes. For a lot of children from single parent families though, paid extracurricular activities are not an option because of financial difficulties. In general, single parents face a lot of pressures on a daily basis in order to meet their multiple responsibilities. Some parents mentioned that they are forced to leave work in order to drive their children to their extra lessons or to go home to check if their children are fine. Parents say that it is extremely difficult to combine their work with the daily needs of their children.

In rural areas, children state that they often go to youth centers. Mothers of children located in rural Limassol mentioned that children do not have a lot of choices because there are no places for their children to play or places with organized athletic activities for their children to exercise. For this reason mothers have to go back and forth to the city in order to take their children to gymnastics or football classes or other extracurricular activities, something which is particularly difficult for them.

Most children, whether from single or two parent families and whether boys or girls help with house chores. Children have a variety of responsibilities inside the house including keeping their personal spaces (e.g. their bedroom) tidy and clean, helping in keeping the house clean, cooking, preparing the table, or cleaning after a meal, but they also have responsibilities outside the house like gardening or running errands. Comparing what teenage girls and teenage boys are responsible for, it seems that teenage girls have a more demanding house work schedule. In fact, in some cases girls have a primary rather than assisting role in carrying out house responsibilities. Consider, for instance, the following dialogue with Vicky, a 12 year old girl from rural Limassol:

Researcher: Tell us Vicky who usually does the house chores now.

Vicky: I do, because my mother goes to work, she only stays home for two weeks during August, I make my bed, I do the laundry, and keep the house tidy.

Researcher: Other chores?

Vicky: I clean the porch and sweep the leaves in the yard.

Apart from having responsibility for cleaning their personal spaces, boys in rural areas often help their parents with outdoor chores like gardening and work in the family fields. In urban areas depending on the size and structure of the family, boys and girls share many of the house chores with their parents. Some of the children though state that they do not do any house chores at all.

In at least two cases, children from single parent families have had paid jobs. Nasos, a 13 year old boy from urban Limassol, mentioned that he had worked in a restaurant as a waiter. Another 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, Leo, when asked during a focus group discussion if he knew about the problems single parent families face, he talked about the serious economic problems of a single parent family he knew explaining how the children of that family had to work on Sundays in a restaurant in order to survive.

As far as holidays are concerned, most of the children who belong to two parent families said that they go on vacation with their parents every year, either locally or abroad. With a few exceptions, children from single parent families said that they do not usually go for vacations with their parents. Similarly, there were few instances of single parents who had not gone on vacation since they became single parents. Some single parents jokingly asked back: “Vacation? What does this word mean?” A few single parents said that if they would go for holidays they would usually visit relatives who live in other areas because they cannot afford to pay for hotels. Many single parents also said that they had not gone for vacations for many years because of financial problems and work responsibilities they have. Others said that they are waiting to find better travel offers to make it more reasonable to travel. Some of the single mothers explained that they are afraid of what their ex-husbands might say about them going for holidays. One woman explained to us that when she went for vacation once her ex-husband accused her in the presence of their children of going for holidays with her boyfriend. Some other single mothers said that they are really thankful when they are able to take a day off while others explained that because their divorce cases are still in court and because they are in conflict with their former spouses they cannot get permission to travel outside the island with their children. On the other hand, two parent families said that they usually go for holidays in Cyprus or abroad and they often, if not always, take their children with them. When the parents travel for business or pleasure on their own, the children usually stay with their grandparents.

4.1.4. Growing up in a Single Parent Family: Likes and Dislikes

Though several children said that there was nothing good about being in a single parent family, some of them identified positive aspects. In some cases, living in a single parent family is a welcome change given that the previous situation when both parents were living together might have been traumatic due to the tension that existed between the two parents who were undergoing divorce. Some children also observed that the family has become more tightly knit with the departure of one of the parents and that its members are closer together as a result. At the same time, there might be double benefits from having two parents who live apart. As Ivoni, a 15 year old girl from urban Nicosia explained in an interview: “Two gifts, two vacations, I don’t need anything else.”

For some children being in a single parent family also means more freedom to do what one wishes without the control exercised by another parent. For one girl, this meant more freedom to have relationships with boys without the father's control. For a boy, it meant being able to stay at home in the afternoon without anyone supervising him (since his mother works) and thus being able to do what he wishes. For some children, living in a single parent family also means that the parent who is present gives the child more attention. And, as some explained, it is easier to get what you want because there is only one parent involved in decisions.

When asked to comment on pleasant incidents that might have taken place in their families, many children from single parent families either noted that they could not remember any such incidents or that they were not aware of anything that really made them happy. Some of the children who answered affirmatively mentioned situations related to entertainment. Lina, a 10 year old girl from urban Limassol, for instance, noted, "in the old days when we had help, my mother took us to the Luna Park, Goodies, McDonalds, and to playgrounds." Some children also referred to the good times they had doing various activities with their parents after they were separated. Tonia, a 14 year old girl from rural Nicosia, explained in an interview: "During Easter my father and grandmother came to visit and we cracked eggs." Other children referred to the birth of a cousin or to the engagement of a sibling. Yet other children referred to their good grades in school. Finally, some other children mentioned feeling happy when their father [i.e., the absent parent) bought them a video game or a computer or when they took trips with their family.

Interestingly, when children from single parent families were asked about unpleasant incidents that happened in their family (e.g. a case of death or separation) they responded directly and without hesitation to the question often mentioning the death of one of their parents or their parents' separation. A nine year old girl from urban Limassol, Lina, said: "Since the first day my mother divorced my father, my father has been beating her up a lot." Other children have also referred to the fights between their parents while others mentioned their mother's, grandfather's, or grandmother's illness. For other children, the process of divorce was one of the things that stood out as particularly sad. A 14 year old girl from urban Limassol, Lenia, explained that she feels

sad when she sees her mother unhappy. In her own words, “Now that I see my mother stressed and unhappy going through the court process it is unpleasant for me.”

Some children referred also to the indifference exhibited by their fathers who are still living in the same house following separation from their mothers. A 12 year old girl from urban Limassol, Koulla, said in an interview: “My father told me on my last birthday that he was going to give me a computer as a present. I am still waiting for it. On Christmas he didn’t give me any present, same goes for Easter. Now he tells me that he is going to give me a present for my birthday, but ...”

Some single parents said that they felt very bad when their children compared themselves to other children who live in two parent families. They said that their children are psychologically affected when they hear other children mentioning various things they are doing with their parents. A single mother living in rural Limassol said: “My child is negatively affected psychologically when he hears his friends saying that they are doing things with their parents. He is asking why he doesn’t have a father to do things with.” Another mother in the same group said: “When for example they go for hunting, they take walks to feel like men . . . my children don’t have a male role model to look up to . . . I can manage the house as well as a woman and a man but I can’t play the man’s role.” Most mothers in fact said that their sons need a father to support them and to share with them their thoughts and experiences, things that they cannot share with their mothers. In one mother’s words: “They need a father to stand by them, they need a father like all other children have. They want to talk to their father about things that they cannot share with their mothers.” Mothers also said that their children are faced with a lot of difficulties at school when there are discussions in class about their family status or about one or both of their parents. Children are coming face to face with their own reality and in some cases they react and express their frustration in relation to their family status. As Chrysa, a 41 year old mother, from urban Nicosia explained: “The problem exists on a daily basis. The first chapter they are taught in school is about the family; they present them with the idea of the father and the mother. My child came back home crying [one day]. After this she became reactive in school and the school principal called me to say that my child is now expressing her feelings about the divorce we have been through back then.” In other cases, mothers have mentioned that their children are expressing reactive behavior in school because of the lack of self-confidence they feel and because of the way they are treated by their teachers. Stella, a

45 year old mother from urban Nicosia explained in a focus group discussion that when she went to school to discuss about her child with the teachers, the latter handled the whole matter in the wrong way. As she elaborated: “When we got divorced my child was 9 years old. He reacted to the whole thing. He wasn’t going to class and when I went to school to talk to the teachers, they were implying that my child was a loser. He lost his self-confidence, no one could really understand him, basically they don’t have the knowledge to handle children who face such problems. They treat them in such a way that they make them become worse.”

Some of the parents said that there are no advantages to being a single parent. Nevertheless, most single mothers said that their lives were much calmer because they no longer had to face psychological violence and they could now enjoy more freedom and independence. Kaiti, a 35 year old single mother from rural Nicosia explained: “I personally enjoy my freedom; I don’t have anyone telling me how to think or talk or where to go or not go.” Other mothers mentioned that they are proud to be able to raise their children by themselves. Some of the mothers also mentioned that their life now without a husband is better because their husbands were not supportive anyway. As Maria, a single mother from urban Nicosia, put it: “It was like chasing their own shadow and never be able to catch it. When the other part is like a shadow, unobtainable, it is better if it doesn’t exist.” Similarly, another mother said: “If he was with us, he would never help us with anything. On the contrary we would only have problems. From the moment he left we have put our lives in order.” Some of the mothers have also talked about the physical and verbal violence that their children had experienced, something which is no longer happening. Marilena, a 32 year old mother from rural Limassol said: “We are spared from the pressures that my children were experiencing. He used to come home furious, screaming, and hitting the children. The children went to sleep with the fear that he would come and beat them up.”

The feelings that single parent children have for their absent fathers are mainly negative. One child said that he felt happy after his father left the family because he wasn’t treating them well when he lived with them. Another 10 year old boy from Limassol, Yiangos, said that his father does not pick them up on the arranged times and days while another child said that he doesn’t want to see his father at all (whom he refers to as his mother’s ex-husband) because he doesn’t like to be friends with him. As he characteristically said: “I don’t like his company. He is mean. First of all he yells a lot.

We are in front of him when he hits his children [i.e., from his other marriage] and many other things. If he ever picks us up he has us look after his children, he never takes us out. No I don't like him, I don't like to go with him.”

Single parent children don't always appreciate a new relationship their single parent may develop. A seven year old girl from urban Limassl, Susanna, said that she didn't like the fact that her mother's partner visited their home. When asked what makes her life difficult, she said: “The fact that my mother has a boyfriend, because he can come everyday to our house . . . I'm also home.” On the other hand, for some children a new relationship for their single parent is very much welcomed. One boy for example, called his mother's boyfriend “dad” and said he feels wonderful when he is with them.

Children from single parent families were very expressive when it came to discussing issues related to physical, emotional, and verbal violence in the family, either before or after their parents' separation. Kiki, a 12 year old girl from urban Nicosia, stated an incidence of violence she experienced with her father who is no longer living with them: “He used to hit me regularly. One time he hit me because I didn't want to go to sleep. My leg was bruised for three weeks.” Lina, a nine year old girl from urban Limassol referring to her own father said: “He screams at us, pulls out our hair, and hits us on the head.” And she added: “My mother divorced him because he did things to her, things you have no idea about. He hit her, and he did many other things to her.” And similarly, Thomas, an eight year old boy from rural Nicosia whose parents' are divorced explained to us in a dramatic way her father's behavior: “He used to pick up what my mother was cooking and throw it out to the trees.” Some of the children also mentioned instances of violence directed towards them by their mothers. The words of Andria, a six year old girl from urban Nicosia, provide an interesting example: “In order to bring me back to my senses the only thing that she is doing is to hit me at some place on my body, on the legs, on the head, or my body. She beats me up in order to bring me back to my senses as a punishment for misbehaving.”

4.1.5. Complexity of Single-parent Family life: Things that Hurt and Things that Help

Family Problems and Suggestions for Improvements

The children who belong to single parent families feel the absence of their parent at home. This problem is crucial, because they believe that one parent cannot support the children the same way that two parents can. Similarly, an 11 year old boy said: “When there is only one parent in the house it feels empty, when both parents are home it is more lively”. The children refer to the economic difficulties which the single parent families are facing but also to the practical problems related to difficulties in the transportation of the children when the responsibility lies with one parent. A 12 year old girl said: “It becomes tiring as we have to use buses, taxis, to force other people to bring you back home”. Moreover the children expressed their wish in seeing their fathers more often and they also mentioned that it would be better if they had more time with both their parents. A 14 year old girl explained: “For example to spend more time with their mother and father. I would like it very much if mother could live closer to be able to go and see him [i.e., her father] more regularly”.

Single parent children’s general problems mainly revolve around the absence of one parent from the home, the economic issue and the tensions in the house. The first one is the absence of the parent from home, a fact that makes the everyday life of the children difficult, the second one is insecurity, and the third one is loneliness. What is pointed out by older children mainly, is that they would like to spend more time with their father and to have more contact with both their parents. A 13 year old boy, when asked about what bothers him in his life he said: “That we don’t live with my dad, what else...? We can’t be at the same time with my dad and mom, for example if we go for a trip we have to go either with my mom or my dad and either one or the other stays behind alone.” Also a boy mentioned about the absence of the father as a male model in the family a fact that it not only bothered him but also it created a lot of problems with his relations with other boys. As he explained: “For example all the other young boys are going to school accompanied by their father, I’m the only one that goes to school with his mother ... because I’m surrounded by women in the house. There isn’t any man in the house to play football with. That’s why I didn’t get used to playing football.” However, the negative attitudes by the children against their parents who don’t live permanently with them feeling good when meeting them. In a question about the problems faced by single parent families, a 9 year old girl said “that I can go to my father’s house, because

his wife doesn't want us... when we visit him, because my sister is a bit overweight he is swearing at her." A 15 year old boy added: "With my father we are not as we used to be. Not that I'm afraid or ashamed of him, but I just don't want to talk to him, I don't feel good about it".

The economic issue is a matter usually brought up by children, as it is mentioned, the inadequate income in the house, puts obstacles in securing the necessary material goods and services. Many of the children are forced to take private lessons only for their main school subjects. They don't have the luxury to take private lessons for additional subjects. A 15 year old boy said that he is having only English language private lessons because he can't pay the tuition for other courses that he has difficulties with. The boy explained: "We have some economic difficulties. I can't take private lessons for a course other than English". Except for private lessons, the economic issue prevents children from getting hold of the material goods that they need. Some of these material goods includes: new furniture, bikes, personal computers, shoes etc. A 13 year old boy mentions related to this: "The fact that I'm a boy means that I play football all the time, I'm going for rides with my bike, this means that my shoes get damaged all the time and my mother may not have money to buy me new ones, I have to wait until she's able to buy me new ones." A 9 year old boy said: "Because we are two and my mother doesn't have much money to support us, this is a bit tough because we are children and we need things". Because of the economic difficulties faced by the members of the single parent families, there are regular collisions and tension in the house, a fact that most of the children are considering it to be a serious problem. A 15 year old boy said: "I'm fighting with my older brother ... because I want more money and she gives me the same amount of money that she gives to my younger brother, I don't like this". Moreover a 9 year old girl added: "Sometimes she bursts on me if I want something sometimes and she doesn't give me what I want I cry, yell and scream." Only a few children mentioned that they are not facing any problems in their families.

Referring to the family problems they face, single parents brought up the issue of support and assistance including the multiple demands arising from their children everyday activities, their upbringing, their transportation to school and after-school activities, and their school work all of which put a lot of pressure on them as single parents. A mother mentioned that one time she felt bad because she couldn't get her child to a birthday party because she did not have the time. In her own words: "It

happened once, I couldn't take her to a birthday party and she stayed home feeling sad. I was sad too but it was very difficult to do it". Some of the parents also mentioned that their parents intervene in their lives while some others said that it bothers them when some people make irritating comments about them. Finally, a mother whose husband passed away said that she wants to figure out how to properly handle her children when they come to her and ask tough questions or when they sometimes become angry and aggressive. The mother also mentioned that it took a long time in order to overcome her husband's death and she did not appreciate it when some of her co-villagers expressed pity towards her.

In a few cases single parents have faced problems in their relationships with their parents because of the way their parents intervene in their personal lives and in the way they raise their children. These were cases when the single parent family lived under the same roof with or very close to the parents. In one case the single mother faced serious problems of interference from her parents as far as her personal life is concerned and as a result she found herself in a psychological dead end. As she explained: "I wanted to see a movie on TV. By midnight before they [i.e., her parents] went to sleep they passed through the corridor to spy and see if I have people over. My mother opened up the window and asked me: 'Why do you like to lose your sleep, love?' This single mother also referred to her parents' interference in her relationship with her children. As she explained: "They think that everything I do is a mistake because I have failed in my marriage and they express this in front of the children. They constantly demean me in front of the children, they don't respect me. Whatever I do is wrong for them. My father said to me: 'Don't go looking for new adventures, I forbid you to go out, I will not allow this. If I go somewhere with my kids they come with us, I'm so frustrated.'" Interestingly, in an interview with one of her daughters we found out that her daughter doesn't like the way her grandparents treat her mother either. As she explained: "Sometimes my grandfather complains to my mother that he doesn't like the clothes she wears. He says to her that she does not look good when my mother buys modern clothes, and I don't like how they treat her." Nevertheless, this girl doesn't want to be away from her grandparents because she feels that she will miss them. When asked to suggest a solution to this problem, she said: "She is under pressure and she's thinking of moving out. I feel that this will make things a bit better but not a lot better because I will miss my grandparents."

When children from single parent families face difficulties they usually turn to their mothers for help and discuss with her what is troubling them. At other times, the children share their experiences with friends or sibling. Some children said that they do not ask anyone for help when they are faced with a problem, whilst they rarely ask the absent parent for help.

Social Treatment of Single-Parent Families: Prejudices and Stereotypes.

Children who live in urban areas do not feel that other people treat them in a negative way. Some children however said that they feel bad for the fact that some people consider children from single parent families to be more prone to risks. The children consider these beliefs to be stereotypical and find them to be widespread in Cyprus. As one girl explains: “A lot of times they say that the children who come from divorced families may get in trouble and this bothers me because they are not all like this. Someone was talking to my mother and said that most of the children who come from divorced families end up getting in trouble with drugs and that sort of thing. There are many children who come from two parent families and end up being worse.” Moreover, some children said that they do not like the fact that some older people are feeling sorry for them when they shouldn’t because they, themselves, feel much better in their new family situation. A 15 year old girl explained: “They are feeling sorry for us and this is not nice. They may talk with others and say ‘the poor children’ . . . they don’t know that I’m feeling much better now than before.” In general children who live in urban areas have friends with whom they get along very well, visit each other’s homes, and are treated normally by the parents of these children. It worth pointing out here that a lot of the children said that their friends do not always know their family situation.

In rural areas the situation is somewhat different with children mentioning more instances of negative attitudes by others towards them. In smaller, closed, rural communities, people are more likely to comment on single parent families something which makes the children feel sad. As a 15 year old boy explained: “For example, they say that if we wanted him [i.e., his father] to come back to us he would have come back. Listening to all this makes me angry because no one knows what we do.” In some cases, the children from single parent families have come into conflict with their classmates because the latter said some things to them in relation to their family status. In the words of one boy: “For example someone said to me ‘your mother and father got

divorced and you can't beat us up' and there was an ugly fight. When someone gets on my nerves I can't control myself." Other children also mentioned that other people gossip about them in the village but that they nevertheless have good relations with both the children and the older people. Only one mother stated that from the day her husband died her neighbors and the other villagers treated her children in the wrong way. When one of her children was asked how she feels about this, she said that she feels sad though as she explained she does not have any problems with the other children they don't visit each other's homes.

A feeling of standing out was expressed by single mothers in rural areas. Some of them explained that people comment on them and their families and that some mothers from two-parent families avoid associating with them. Moreover, some mothers complained that they cannot form relationships with men without society commenting on them and that when they do have serious relationships the parents of their partners interfere and try to discourage a marriage. In rural areas, some single mothers also complained that older men occasionally approach them assuming that because they are divorced they are sexually available something which makes them very uncomfortable. Finally, single mothers' relationships with others seem to be affected in cases of divorce. As some of them explained to us, after they got divorced they lost their close female friends because the latter were afraid that they would lose their husbands to them.

In general, the single parents we talked to did not seem to think that parents and children from two-parent families are prejudiced against their children. Nevertheless, a few instances of uncomfortable situations were mentioned whereby other children asked the children from single parent families to tell them why their parents got divorced or inquired about the absent father, etc. Similarly, some neighbors appear to be intrusive with their questions to children from single parent families in their need to find out the specifics of the family situation (e.g., Why did your father not come to pick you up this week?) thus making the children feel uncomfortable and sad.

The most general complaint expressed to us by single parents was that society does not fully accept single parent families and makes unfair assumptions about them. Many single mothers also complained about the assumptions that society (including the media) make about single parent families and about children in particular (e.g., that the children from single parent families are delinquent, that they are drugs users or much

more likely to be drug users, or that they engage in criminal activities like stealing, etc). Likewise, some parents encountered problems in relation to societal attitudes about their financial situation as single parent families. Thus, on the one hand, single mothers explained that some people want to help their families and they feel obligated to accept the help because people do not like it if you refuse their help. On the other hand, there is an assumption that if a single mother is doing financially well then she must be earning the money in an inappropriate way. Similarly, if a single mother is seen spending money for entertainment people assume that she is really faking her financial need and that she has lots of money to spend.

Most of the parents from two parent families said that they knew single parent families in which either the parents split up or one of them had died. The main problem that parents from two parent families identify for these families is the financial problem and the vulnerable emotional world of the children involved. Parents from two parent families also pointed out that their relationships with single parents are not always close given that in some cases single parents become isolated. They add that this in turn has negative consequences on the children of these families who develop psychological problems.

As one mother explained: “The children never learned how to go out, they never went out as a family because that was the father’s way of thinking. The child ran out one night and went to his mother’s grave.” Some parents from two parent families also mentioned being in a difficult position when there are single parents in some get-togethers. As one woman explained: “Let’s say during New Year’s Eve everybody gathers in the house but those children are so lonely. They see your family gathered together, being loving and caring to each other, exchanging wishes, but those children only have their mother or father. And a lot of times, let’s say their son comes to me and says to me ‘I wish my uncle could be my father.’ ” Now that my children are older and understand more, I tell them not to show any act of love in front of these children so that they wouldn’t get hurt.” Parents from two parent families also said single parent families are not always faced with economic problems but that the absence of one of the parents still creates problems for the children. Finally, some of the parents pointed out that if the relationships between the single parents are good then the negative consequences of a separation on the children’s psychological world is minimized.

4.1.6. Parents' Views from Two Parent Families

When asked how different things would be for them if they were single parents, almost all parents from two parent families said that it would be very difficult for them. Men in particular mentioned that it would be almost impossible for them to take all the responsibilities that would have derived from the situation. According to them, women are much more able to cope with such situations because they are by nature much more patient and understanding. A mother supported the idea that it is a matter of character and that if her husband wasn't with her today her children would still be fine because she believes that children's character is defined by the mother. This view is shared by some of the men we talked to. As one father explained: "A mother can take care of the children, a father cannot take care of them without the support of the mother...if the father goes to jail then he has disappeared, a mother can still keep her children. If a mother turns out to be no good, the family will be destroyed. A woman can get along with it, for a man it is impossible."

Nearly all parents from two parent families said that they would like to devote more time with their children, though they point out the importance of quality time without stress. They said that they would have liked more time to play with their children, more time to communicate with them in order to build a good relationship, and in general more time to do things for their children without pressure and stress.

4.1.7. Summary

- Some single mothers who live in rural areas complain about sexual harassment by men in their communities.
- Many single mothers who have separated or divorced say that they feel freer and more independent in their new family situation.
- Most single parents feel that (with few exceptions) the children and parents from two parent families treat the children from single parent families rightly and do not discriminate against them.
- Some single mothers say that they are not entirely accepted by their communities and that sometimes people make unfair assumptions about them and their children.

- Single parent families often receive significant psychological support from the extended family.
- Children from single parent families identify both positive (e.g., the end of conflicts between parents in the family) and negative (e.g., financial problems, the absence of one of the parents from the family) aspects of life in single parent families.
- Children from single parent families recommend more financial support from the state for themselves and their families and more time to spend with their families.

Chapter 4.2: School Life

4.2.1. Introduction

This chapter maps the daily school life of children who come from single parent families, the problems they face with other children and their teachers at school, and the way others treat them. Moreover, the chapter discusses what the children have difficulties with at school, what they like and do not like about school, and their suggestions for improving their school environment. Finally, this chapter describes teachers' perceptions of the problems that children from single parent families face at school, of how others treat them at school, of how they, as teachers, try to help the children, and their own experiences with the school material which addresses single parent families.

4.2.2. Typical School Days: Children's Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

This is how a typical school day for children from two parent families is described: After children wake up, they have breakfast, and then go to school. Some children go on foot while others are driven to school by their parents. One child reported going to his grandmother's house to take the bus to school.

While at school, children engage in more or less the same activities: lessons, break, food, playing, discussions and jokes, lessons again, and so on. Games that the children play may include water sprinkling with balloons in the summer, football, wolves and lambs, etc. Some children also referred to quarrels and fights they have with other children and how they are naughty and get on the teachers' nerves.

Most children from single parent families did not mention specific incidents which made them feel happy at school. Some specifically said that nothing that would make them happy took place at school while others said that they could simply not remember any happy events at school. Nevertheless, some children pointed to pleasant events which took place at school such as the good grades one child received in a class, when one of the girls was elected school president, when another one had her name-day, or when the children organized for Mother's Day a surprise party at school for all their mothers. Moreover, the children expressed their joy when there was some school

entertainment or educational excursion organized or when they were given a prize for their achievements in a lesson. Themis, an 11 year old student from urban Limassol, explained: “The fact that I had Mr. Mario as a teacher helped me very much, emotionally too . . . he made me believe that I can make it”.

When asked about any unpleasant events they experience at school most children could not point to anything concrete. Some children from single parent families however mentioned some unpleasant events. Two children said that it makes them sad to see their friends smoking. Some other children commented on their teachers’ bad or inappropriate behavior towards them though they did not attribute this behavior of the teachers to their family status as members of single parent families. As Nasos, a 13 year old boy from urban Limassol, explained, “with the teachers who get on our nerves . . . they are irrational. I got 20 out of 20 and she did not give me that grade in the final report, that made me really upset.” Moreover, some children felt that their teachers are biased towards them: “in pre-primary school the teacher could not tolerate me, whenever something happened I was to blame.” A seven year old girl from urban Limassol, Susanna, said that she feels that the other children at school do not want her: “some boys . . . I fall down and nobody cares to [help me get up]. They hate me at school.” An 11 year old boy from urban Limassol, Themis, similarly explained: “When I was in the first grade, the whole class was against me. They would put me on the floor, step on me, and then when I would start hitting them back, the teacher would come and she would reprimand me. On many occasions, when I would go home from school, I wanted to commit suicide, I wanted to hurt myself, I don’t know why.” However, it is important to emphasize that the children did not attribute these incidents to prejudice against them for being children from single parent families but rather to other factors.

In general, children from single parent families seem to be happy with school, with some exceptions of children who either feel bored with school or face particular problems with some teachers (e.g., the case of a 15 year old boy who told us that he quarrels with teachers all day). There were very few cases of children who said they they did not like school at all. In fact the conflicts that children have in school (e.g., with teachers and other children) seems to be the only thing that displeases most of them about school and most of them mentioned their good relations with their teachers, principals, and friends as examples of what makes them happy about school.

Many children from two parent families also stated that they do not like some of their teachers because of the bad communication that exists between them. Some children mentioned having difficulties in their relations with some of the teachers who insult or yell at them or who give them a lot of homework. A 13 year old boy from rural Nicosia, Stamatis, mentioned that school is boring because every day they do the same thing: “the school gets on my nerves, it is boring, every day [we do] the same thing . . . I am not, let’s say impressed, to want to go, but it is Ok.” Other children, however, said that they like school because they find their friends there and play with them.

Children from single parent families, like their counterparts from two parent families, mention that what they dislike about school is that sometimes they do not have good relationships with their teachers. Many of the children say that their teachers are not sincere and polite with them. A 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, Leo, explained: “He [i.e., the teacher] told me not to laugh because my teeth resemble those of a donkey, he nicknamed another boy “ballerina,” and told another one that he looks like a goat.” Some of the children also mentioned the bad relationships they have with some of their fellow students.

Children from single parent families did not have much to say about the positive aspects of school. However, some children did point out some positive aspects mainly centering around the good relationships they have with the teachers. One child stated that he likes school when he is talked to nicely. A 14 year old girl from rural Limassol, Tonia, said that school is good because the teachers are nice and pay attention to them: “It is a nice environment, the teachers are good with us, and because students are few, they pay more attention [to us], we all know one another, we are all friends at school.” Similarly, another boy explained that he likes a particular course because of the teacher who teaches it, with whom the students can talk about football, lessons, as well as other things.

Most children from single parent families said that their parents visit the school at different times and not just when they are called by the teachers. Many of the children mentioned that there is no need for the parents to visit the school since they are good students and do not face any problems with their performance at school. Some children, however, mentioned that their parents visit the school only after being invited by the

teachers. For instance, one child whose mother died explained that his father rarely goes to school because he does not have the time. Finally, most children said that their absent parent (who is usually the father) only rarely goes to school to inquire about their performance.

Single parents believe that most of the difficulties their children face at school result from the inadequate communication between themselves as parents and the teachers and similarly between their children and the teachers. Single parents attribute particular significance to the role of the teacher in providing emotional support to children which they feel is neglected by teachers who are simply trying to cover school material. Parents also feel that the fact that most teachers do not know anything about the children's family situations often results in their mishandling of them in the classroom. Maria, a 45 year old single mother from Nicosia, explained: "They [i.e., teachers] don't even know, they don't even call the parents before the new year begins to be informed and take the necessary measures, to observe if there really is a problem with the particular child." Parents feel that teachers need more training to be able to deal effectively with the children who come from single parent families or who have other particularities. Moreover, parents consider the way that teachers treat them as parents and their children incorrect because they are not at all discreet in how they handle their being different.

Parents from two parent families mentioned that their children do not face any particular problems in school, except for the fact that in some cases their children might have difficulty adapting to school following a vacation, but they also noted that they eventually get used to it. Parents also feel that their children are very pressured with school work and that they need time to relax to some degree.

Transportation

In rural areas most of the children who come from single parent families go to school by bus. They say that it does not bother them going to school by bus. On the contrary, they like it because they have fun. Occasionally, however, they say when the bus breaks down they have a problem. In towns, the children from single parent families are transported to school mainly by the mothers and grandparents but sometimes they also go on foot. Also, aunts, neighbors, and friends often provide help in transporting the

children to school and back especially when they also have children attending the same school. In many cases, close relatives, and grandparents in particular, play a more important support role with children's transportation to out of school activities. Nevertheless, there are cases when parents are unable to transport their children to an out of school activity because of lack of time and conflicting demands on their schedules. Leo, a 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, who comes from a big family said: "We are many, very often it may not be convenient for me to go where I want to go on a particular day and time . . . Let's say I want to go somewhere, I cannot because she [i.e., his mother] is taking someone else to his afternoon lesson." Some children actually choose to attend extra lessons near their home so as to be able to go on foot, since their parents are not able to transport them for one reason or another. A 16 year old girl from urban Limassol, Sophia, explained in a focus group: "I am always indebted to others because my mother does not have a car. Ok, I am used to finding extra lessons near my home in order to be able to go on foot."

Most of the children said that they do not mind their grandparents taking them to school. Even so, Koulla, a 13 year old girl from urban Limassol, said: "I do mind a little when my grandmother comes, because she is driving my grandfather's car, his work car which is not nice, eh, only because of that." A 7 year old boy from urban Limassol, Gregory, also expressed his wish that his mother picks him up from school: "I want my mother to come and pick me up, so that I do not only see her at 8 o'clock when she comes home from work." In general, there were few reported cases of the absent parent providing help with children's transportation and those cases usually involved emergencies.

In rural Limassol, children from two parent families who need to attend school in a neighboring village often go to school by bus something which they do not mind. The rest of the children are transported to school by their grandparents and in a few occasions by their parents. Town children are usually transported to school and to out of school activities by their parents and very rarely by their grandparents. The children sometimes also go on foot or use the buses provided by the private institutions where they attend extra lessons. Only rarely, do they go by taxi.

Parents from two parent families from rural Nicosia mentioned that their children go to school by car or bus (if they come from a nearby village) or walk to school if they live in

the same village where the school is located. The same pattern holds true for their afternoon activities.

4.2.3. Children's Relations with Class-mates and Teachers

In general, children from single parent families have good relationships with their classmates with whom they sometimes share even their personal problems. Most of the children are satisfied with their friends and enjoy the time they spend with them. At the same time, some children mentioned that they often have conflicts with their friends. An 11 year old boy from urban Limassol, Themis, explained that very often he feels that he is not welcomed in his friends' company. In his own words: "They place me in a second category. They have improved a lot, they do not attack [me], but they neglect me." Similarly, a nine year old girl from urban Limassol, Lina, said that she only has one friend and that she feels that the rest of her classmates hate her. Overall, the children who have problems with their friends are very few in number but the extent of the problems they face seems to be great.

Children from two parent families have a good time with their friends at school and they enjoy playing ball during the breaks, talking to each other, or studying together. Even so, many of the children mentioned that they may often quarrel or have misunderstandings with their friends during play. Some children said that their classmates may speak with irony to them or pick on them and for this reason they have conflicts. Parents from two parent families agree with their children and say that their children in general, have good relationships with their friends and classmates.

4.2.4. How Other Children and Teachers Treat Children from Single Parent Families

In general, children from single parent families do not face particular problems with their fellow students which stem from the fact that they belong to single parent families. Even so, there are a few cases where children from single parent families report feeling sad when their fellow students indiscriminately refer to the reasons which made their family a single parent one. As a 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, Leo, said: "In my class, a comment may escape from some of the children concerning my family, trying to insult my father, my mother, saying that my father had a reason to leave, everyone thinks as they wish, but they stick to their own issues and then look into other people's

affairs.” Similarly, Dina, a 12 year old girl from urban Nicosia, had a conflict with a fellow student when he called her an “orphan,” while an 11 year old boy from rural Nicosia, Nino, said that he had a clash with a friend of his because the latter said to him something bad about his mother. Another 14 year old girl from urban Limassol, Lenia, said that she was upset when another female student spread information that she entrusted to her about a family problem she faces.

The opinions of single mothers are split with some of them saying that there are no particular problems in their children’s relationships with other children and others arguing that their children often have conflicts with other children and are being stigmatized because of their family situation. A 33 year old single mother from rural Nicosia, Stavri, explained: “It is the labels that our children carry. My elder son has dyslexia. He was immediately labeled as a child coming from a family whose parents separated”. Another mother mentioned that when her child went to gymnasium (secondary school), her son’s fellow students heard that he was a child whose parents separated and he was constantly asked about the reasons which led to his parents’ divorce, something which upset him a lot.

Most children from single parent families said that teachers treat them the same way as other children. Some of the children, however, said that they have some problems with their teachers resulting mainly from bad communication with them, but they do not attribute this to any prejudice on the part of teachers about their family status but rather explain these problems to personal likes and dislikes on the part of the teachers towards the students. A 10 year old girl from rural Limassol, Soulla, however, felt that sometimes the teachers or the principal treat her in a different way from other children. She attributes this difference in treatment to the fact that her father is not at home and he therefore does not intervene on her behalf. As she explained: “Yes, when my father was at home, when I told him things like that, he would be angry and he would go and reprimand the teacher. Now, my mother does not quarrel. She may tell them not to do it again but they are not afraid of her.” Similarly, a 14 year old girl, though somewhat unsure, explained that the school principal changed his attitude towards her since her father was imprisoned. In her own words: “Since then, I think, his behaviour towards me is not the same, that is, in the past he considered me a better student and now he does not give me so much attention. I do not know if it is due to this fact.”

Single parents in turn feel that teachers see their children “with a different eye,” and that they do not approach them with the appropriate sensitivity. They add that teachers sometimes discriminate in the way they treat children by taking into account the family condition and the social and financial standing of the child’s family. A mother from the city of Limassol explained: “Children from families of a good social standing, where both parents are present, are excused if they present problems. But if my son did something, they would punish both me and my son, or even suspend him from school.” A mother explained that her child has been “labeled” in school and teachers explain the learning and other problems that he faces in terms of his parents’ separation. Another mother complained about an incident when she and her child felt badly because the teacher asked the children to write a composition about their father knowing that the father of that child had died. The mother further explained that she talked to the teacher about this and that the teacher apologized for what happened. Another mother mentioned that when she confided in her son’s teacher some problem that her child faced, the teacher, instead of supporting the child and helping him overcome the problem, started “attacking” both the child and the mother. Finally a mother expressed her disappointment with the teachers, when, instead of helping her child who serious behavioral problems at school after his father left home, they told her that they could not do anything and that they “raise their hands up.” A few of the parents said that they do not feel that teachers treat their children unfairly and that teachers, when necessary, give more attention and love to the children who come from single parent families.

4.2.5. Children from Single Parent Families Reflecting on their own School Behaviour

When children from single parent families were asked about how they see their own behaviour in school said that their behaviour is normal or good. Some children said that unless they are provoked by others, they do not exhibit any negative behaviour. A 10 year old boy from urban Nicosia, Thanos, explained: “Sometimes if I am outraged, I may lose control. Let’s say someone is picking on me and provokes me a lot, I may get mad and hit him.” It is worth noting that some children said that their behaviour in school also depends on their mood. As an 11 year old boy from rural Nicosia, Nino, said: “[My behavior is] sometimes good and sometimes bad. The problem is if I am picked on, if I am scorned, I am enraged. The good thing is that if I am in a good mood and full of joy, I like it very much.” A 14 year old girl from urban Limassol, Lenia,

similarly said: “Most of the time I am normal, except if something happens with my family, with my friends, I may be a little abrupt sometimes if I am a bit upset.” Other children said that they do not create any particular problems in school, except when they join in with their classmates and have fun or perform tricks on their teachers.

4.2.6. Problems at School and Teacher Support

When children from single parent families were asked about problems they face at school they mainly mentioned problems in their relationships with teachers and some of their fellow students. Some children mentioned that their teachers do not pay enough attention to them and that they are not particularly interested in maintaining order at school when necessary. This in turn creates problems in the relationships of children with each other. A 12 year old girl from urban Nicosia, Olga, provides the following commentary about her understanding of the teachers’ role in addressing conflicts in school: “They reprimand [someone] once, they may reprimand [that person] a second time, the third time they tell you to solve it [i.e., the problem] yourself. They do not make them understand their mistake. The teachers do not do anything. They are insensitive. They will do nothing.” Other children also mentioned similar problems that have to do with the antisocial behaviour that some of their fellow students exhibit and which interrupt the smooth flow of their lessons at school. An 11 year old boy from urban Limassol, Themis, explained that other children sometimes leave him or others outside from the group or are indifferent towards one another something which he dislikes. The same child said that he is annoyed by the fact that teachers promote the good students and do not treat him on an equal basis with the other children. There were very few references by the children to the problematic construction of schools and related problems. Finally, some of the children said that they do not face any particular problems at school.

There are some cases of single parents who are generally happy with the teachers and the way they treat their children. In general, however, single mothers talked in a negative way about school and school-related problems that they or their children face. The most important problems they pointed to, focus mainly on the teachers’ and principals’ lack of sensitivity and understanding towards their children, as well as the lack of planning which could prevent or solve problems which arise. Single parents consider that their children sometimes become victims of negative discrimination by

teachers and some mothers also referred to economic or other help that the school may provide to their children saying that very often this help is given in a way which insults, stigmatizes, or humiliates their children. With regards to their relationship with teachers, single parents consider that even in those cases where no particular problem exists, teachers treat them with pity and as a result they develop an intense feeling of inferiority. A significant number of single parents also consider that school does not provide their children with sufficient support and as a result their children present more and more learning and behavioural problems. Many single parents recommended training for teachers on how to handle single parent families and their children.

4.2.7. Children's and Parents' Experiences with Support Services at School

Sometimes, children from single parent families, as they explain, go to their teachers when they face a particular problem but at other times they avoid them. Leo, a 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, said that he does not want to share with the teachers his anxieties because he considers them “chatterboxes.” As he explained: “I don't go because most of them gossip, when a student misses a class he [i.e., the teacher] might say a thousand things [about him], let's say, that he is not a good student, that he doesn't have good grades.” When the children go to their teachers it is usually to ask them for help with their lessons or to tell them about disagreements and quarrels they have with other children. Some children describe the help they receive from their teachers as very good. An 11 year old boy from urban Limssol, Themis, explained: “I had Mr. Mario as my teacher, he was very nice, he helped me a lot with spelling, I feel he also helped me a lot psychologically.” It should be noted that the children do not discuss family or personal matters with the teachers but rather more general matters.

The children who come from two parent families do not face particular problems at school. Even so, when they need the help of an adult, they go to their teachers, their principal, the school counselors, their friends, or their parents. They consider the help they get from them as sufficient.

Single parents have, on occasion intervened, in the role of the school feeling that it is their own duty to point out to the teachers how to treat and show understanding to their children. A single mother explained that while the teacher had been informed about the family situation of her child, the school did not treat the subject with the required

tactfulness when the child was called to fill in a form with information about the father who is away from home. More specifically, as the mother explained, the principal called the student to his office to ask him where his father is, while he could, according to the mother, be informed directly from her about this issue.

Parents of two parent families associate the problems their children face in school with the limited time that the teachers have to pay attention to their children. Parents argue for the need to have more and closer contact between the teachers and the children. As one parent explained: “The teachers should function as parents.” Parents also mention the need for more frequent communication between themselves and the teachers something which could prevent some problems from arising.

All parents from two parent families who come from rural Limassol said that they are very pleased with the teachers, that they communicate well with them, and that when they have a problem they can go and discuss it with them. On the contrary, the parents from urban Limassol said that communication is not always good between their children and the teachers and hold the teachers responsible for ensuring the smooth adaptation and attendance of their children in school.

4.2.8. Teachers’ Views, Experiences, and Suggestions

Teachers defined single parent families in a variety of ways but most of them included all the four types that we focus on in this study, namely, divorced, separated, widowed, and unmarried families. Teachers also emphasized that single parent families are those families where children grow up with only one parent in the home. However, some teachers provided more expanded definitions of single parent families which included other family types and circumstances something which suggests that their definitions are informed to some extent by the complexities of the family realities that they, as teachers, are familiar with and/or aware of. For example, those families where parents live together but one of them is mostly absent and shows little interest in the family, were characterized as single parent families. On the other hand, those families which are divorced or separated but where both parents spend time with the children and show an active interest in their upbringing, were not considered to be single parent families.

Teachers group the factors which they think contribute to the problems that the children from single parent families face in three categories. First, they point out the character and the role of the single parents, that is whether and to what extent the parents actively support their children, whether and to what extent they pay attention to their children or whether they neglect them (e.g., Are children helped with their homework? Do they roam in the streets during after school hours?, etc), and whether and to what extent children are exposed to family arguments and violence (in cases of divorce or separation). Second, teachers identify financial problems and pressures as contributing to the problems that these children face. And finally, they point out the psychological problems and issues the children face as a result of their family situations (e.g., their need to feel included and not rejected from different groups, their reduced self-esteem and self-respect, etc).

Teachers also pointed out that on many occasions other children do not even know that some of their classmates come from single parent families. From all our discussions with teachers no incidents of prejudice, stereotyping, name-calling, or making fun of, children from single parent families were reported to us. In fact, some teachers explained that many children today take divorce and separation for granted and do not consider it to be anything exceptional. In those cases, where a child's parent dies the other children are likely to express their sadness and support to the single parent child. In terms of their relationships with other children, some teachers observed that it is common for children from single parent families to seek each other out in order to develop friendships.

The teachers told us that from their experience few teachers and very rarely make unfair assumptions about children from single parent families (e.g., assuming that they are not good students). The teachers, however, were quite clear that other children do not seem to be prejudiced against the children who come from single parent families.

Some teachers pointed out that single parents do not differ in any way from other parents in terms of the interest they show about their children's school performance. Thus, on those cases when single parents show indifference it is not unlike what the teachers see with other parents. Some of the single parents though make it a point to inform the teachers that they are single parents in hopes that the teachers will then be able to help their children better. Teachers also pointed out that some of the parents who

are going through the process of divorce avoid going to school for that period because they are embarrassed and instead prefer to call teachers on the phone.

Teachers reported to us very few cases of single parents complaining about the ways the school or the teachers handle their children. Nevertheless, some teachers mentioned a few incidents of children from single parent families complaining to them about the teacher's inappropriate comments in the classroom (e.g., the teacher might have asked a student to bring his father to school though the father had abandoned the family and does not have any contact with the child, etc). Occasionally, when the school offers a free meal or some other gift to a child from a single parent family, a parent might complain that his/her child is stigmatized when this is done given that other children might become aware of this treatment their child receives. Finally, some teachers pointed out that many single parents tend to be more sensitive about the ways teachers treat their children as compared to parents who come from two parent families: they tend to be overprotective, in other words, and they are more likely to complain if the teacher reprimands or disciplines their child.

Some teachers explained that they did not see any clear differences in the academic performance of children who come from single parent families as compared to the performance of other children. In fact, they fully acknowledged the intellectual abilities of these children. Some other teachers, however, argued that some of these children tend to do poor academically because they do not study enough, are indifferent about (or show reduced interest in) their studies, or are absent-minded in class and they are more likely to be delinquent, reactionary, aggressive and to disturb the teacher and other children during a lesson. Furthermore, some of these children might be spoiled because their parents tend to be overprotective and attentive to them in order to make up for the absence of the other parent. Moreover, some teachers suggested that some of these children do not trust others easily, have low self-esteem and express sadness, and in general need more attention and emotional support from the teacher. Finally, for some teachers those children who have a problem usually fall in two extremes: at one end of the spectrum are children who tend to be very hyper in the classroom and cause problems for the teacher while at the other end of the spectrum are children who tend to be very passive and indifferent about what happens in class. Nevertheless, some teachers challenged the assumption that children from single parent families are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems while some of those who did point out to

particular problems also acknowledged that children from two parent families might also exhibit similar problems.

Schoolbooks include very few references to single parent families something which limits teachers from discussing such issues in the classroom. When a passage includes a word that can encourage a discussion on single parent families (e.g., divorce), some teachers take the opportunity to address the issue with the children. However, most teachers pointed out that they specifically avoid covering a particular passage which refers to single parent families because they feel that they lack adequate training in handling such sensitive issues. When they decide to address the issue, they downplay the reference fearing that some children who come from single parent families will feel sad. Thus, when the class includes a child whose father or mother died, teachers try to be very careful in terms of what they say and what issues they discuss in class to avoid making these children sad. Some teachers explained to us that they, occasionally, run into problems with students when they unintentionally make assumptions about the latter's families. As one teacher explained, when he asked a student to describe his father as part of an in-class exercise, the student became upset because he came from a single parent family and did not have a good relationship with his father.

4.2.9. Children's Suggestions for Improving School Life

Children from single parents made a number of suggestions for the improvement of the school conditions including the upgrading of the construction and technical infrastructure of the schools (e.g., playgrounds, heating, desks, etc.), the abolition of the school uniform, etc. Many children suggested that the teachers should be nicer, more polite and less demanding and pressing. A 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, Leo, said: "We must have nicer teachers, they should not yell, they should not insult us in school." A 6 year old girl from urban Nicosia, Andia, referring to her teacher: "If she could change her ways a little, she would become the best teacher." Another child said he would like the principal to change: "Our principal does not treat us nicely, she does not love the children." A 7 year old girl also commented on children's behavior with one another: "I want the behaviour of my friends to change, they should talk to me nicely, the school should become more beautiful and happier." The children of single parent families do not know what could be done to improve or increase the support they

receive at school. The suggestions of children from two parent families focus mainly on courses they dislike and how to shorten the school schedule.

4.2.10. Summary

- Children from single parent families say that they are satisfied with the support they receive from their teachers and from the way they treat them.
- Most teachers feel that children from two parent families do not stigmatize or treat unfairly children from single parent families.
- Children from single and two parent families say that family status is not a criterion in their friendships.
- Some children from single parent families experience misunderstandings with some of their friends and peers who might occasionally be insensitive with them.
- Single parents say that teachers' support to their children is not adequate and that teachers' behavior sometimes stigmatizes their children.
- Single parents say that they would like teachers to have more awareness about single parent families and be more willing to support their children.
- Single parents often depend on other members of the extended family or friends to meet their children's transportation needs.
- In general teachers say that they do not see significant differences in the academic performance of children from single parent families when compared with children from two parent families though they sometimes identify children from single parent families with lower academic performance which they attribute to the problems that these children face in their lives.
- Teachers do not have proper materials to teach and discuss with children issues related to family diversity and single parent families in particular.
- Teachers say that in general they avoid discussing issues that relate to single parent families because they feel that they are not adequately trained to address the issues sensitively and also because they are afraid that what they say in class might end up hurting the children from single parent families.
- In general teachers say that they are satisfied with their relations with single parents.

Chapter 4.3: Financial Issues

4.3.1. Introduction

The problems faced by single parent families are diverse. Children of single parent families and their parents often face psychological problems and problems related to their relations, their everyday living, the maintenance of the household, the school and their lessons, and their behavior. One of the most important problems faced, however, is the financial one, which can often influence most of the everyday activities of the members of the single parent family, their psychological condition, their future plans and their work or school achievement. This chapter tries to record the financial situation of single parent families, the consequent problems they face and the way members of two parent families understand single parent families.

4.3.2. Experiencing Poverty in Single Parent Families

While a number of children in their individual interviews and the focus groups state that they are happy with the financial condition of their family or that they face almost no economic problems, the greatest proportion of the children not only state that they have a financial problem, but also that the financial problem is the most important problem of their families or even their only problem. Sophia, a 16 year old girl from the city of Limassol (who lives with only one parent, her younger brother and her grandmother), touches on the issue as well as three other related problems faced by single parent families:

When you live with one parent, the most important problem is the financial one, because from only one parent ..., only one is working, only one contributes usually, therefore the most important [problem] is the financial [problem]. If, lets say, you do not have a permanent home, if your parent does not have a permanent job, certainly the most important thing is the financial one.

The issues identified by this child are: employment issues faced by the single parent; the issue of housing which many families face and the issue of payment for maintenance of the children which some parents, mainly fathers (since mothers are usually given custody of their children by courts of law in case of divorce) often avoid, delay, or have difficulty, providing for one or another reason. This last issue is a problem which can bring to despair the single mother but also the children themselves. Especially difficult

is the transitional period of the family, from nuclear to single parent, irrespective of whether this is as a result of death of one of the parents, separation, divorce, or one of the parents being away, given that the family has to adapt to the new financial situation (e.g., to one income rather than two; to debts made in common by both parents and their settlement; etc). Moreover, in those cases where the couple decides to separate, there is a reasonable time until the court decision for the custody and maintenance of the children is reached, so the parent staying alone with the children has to deal with this financial anomaly.

Certainly, the court decision does not necessarily mean that the parent who is obligated to pay will do so and as a result both mothers and children often live in financial desperation. The words of Koulla and Leo are characteristic of what such situations may entail:

Sometimes, my mother does not have enough money to buy me things, so I phone my dad, but my dad sometimes does not want to give me money, because he says he has more children in the family (Koulla, 13 years old, city of Limassol).

Let's say my father has left my mother and gone. And let's say he will come and give ten pounds for us to get by, he does not know that we have to buy, milk and such things, let's say . . . for school there comes a moment when we say to him 'I want money to go to a birthday party,' or I will go to the grocer, and he tears himself up because he has to give us money. With ten pounds what can you get? So sometimes you may be embarrassed, let's say, because it is my village that we go shopping and people know about it. In general, it has been a long time since he has given us money. And we get by because we economize, but if he had been at home, let's say, it would not have been like that. Alright, we would have had money every day, and we would have been more comfortable both at home and I don't know, in everything (Leo, 15 years old, Rural Limassol).

It is also important to point out, as is also clear from our focus group discussions with the single parents, that there are parents who do not only pay the money they are legally obligated to pay for children's maintenance, but also give their former spouses additional money to meet the children's extra needs and wishes. On the other hand, however, this does not necessarily mean that the financial problems of single parent families are eliminated.

Even when the father provides additional financial assistance from what he is obligated to pay for his children, many single parent families still face a significant financial

problem, namely, housing. For single parent families who do not own a house, or are left without a house after the transition to single parenthood and as a result end up renting, things are particularly difficult. If the single parent does not have a regular, full-time job and a stable income things become dramatic. The “luckier” ones are usually those who have relatives who are willing to help them financially, either directly with money, or indirectly with presents, meals, etc. In this way, the single parent family ends up being dependent on the goodwill, sensitivity, compassion or pity that the relatives feel for the family. The following dialogues with two children, Giagkos who is 10 years old from the city of Limassol and Lenas who is 15 years old from the city of Nicosia are particularly revealing:

Researcher: The question is, are you satisfied with the money you have?

Giagkos: No.

Researcher: Do you want to tell me what problems you face?

Giagkos: Madam, to help you understand, I have more money than my mother does.

(. . .)

Giagkos: As I told you before, because we do not bring many things at home for lunch because we not have enough money to get lunch, we go to my grandmother. My grandfather, who has some money because he works, feeds us and we stay there until the afternoon. When we go out, my mother tells us not to ask for many things because we do not have much money. And we open her purse and she has very little money: she may have a five-pound note and some shillings.

Researcher: Are you happy with the money that your family has?

Lenas: Moderately happy. Let’s say I am so - so.

Researcher: Can you help me understand?

Lenas: There are cases, that is, when we do not manage with shopping at the supermarket, everyday. There are days when I am hungry and I call my father and tell him: “Come, take me and feed me.”

As some single parents explained, this situation is difficult to change. Moreover, in some cases the family is forced to sell the only property it owns (which was intended for the children, for their studies, etc) in order to survive. As a result, the intentions and plans of the family for the future collapse. The life conditions and future plans of single mothers who lack any kind of support from others is even worse. One of the mothers we talked to, explained how she has no one to help her financially and in order to pay the rent and provide her children with the basics such as food, clothing, and extra lessons she has to work three jobs. Frustrated she asks herself: “How much longer will a woman endure working so hard, in these kinds of hard jobs . . . the jobs I have are not easy . . . in order to raise my children?”

Apart from the stress that single parents face in order to make ends meet in financial matters, they also have to deal with the pressure of comparison that their children make with the way of life of other children who are in a better financial position and an accompanying feeling of inferiority. As a result, single parents have additional motivation or pressure to satisfy the demands of the children. This pressure may take the form of an extra job which will help satisfy the demands of the children or the parents' overall understanding of what the children need to have.

4.3.3. What They Would Like to Have but Can't Afford

When the children from single parent families were asked "What would you do if you had more money" in individual interviews and focus group discussions, their answers varied and pinpointed the deprivations faced by the children as a result of the economic problems their families face and the consequences of these deprivations on their social lives and psychological wellbeing. Minas a 16 year old boy from the city of Nicosia, who participated in a focus group discussion, said that if he had more money he would be in a better position, he would go out with his friends, and have fun. More specifically, he said: "If they [i.e., his friends) go to places where you need to pay to enter, I do not go inside, or if they go to some place to eat, I go with them, they eat and I watch." A large number of children mentioned out-of-school activities they would like to participate in if they had more money, like private lessons, swimming or other sports like martial arts, music or dancing classes, etc, while other children mentioned everyday needs like clothes, shoes, food, medicines and even transportation means for their parents' needs. Finally, some other children focused on housing and housing related needs such as owning a house, having a bigger or more comfortable house, repairing an existing house, or having a room of their own and furniture, electric appliances or office equipment for the house. In a conversation with Cyrus, a 14 year old boy from the city of Limassol who sleeps in the same room with his sister who is 16, a number of these needs are identified:

Researcher: Now, tell me about your family life. How well are you getting by?

Cyrus: Alright, I miss a few things, but it is ok because my mother offers me things, despite the fact that I do not have my dad.

Researcher: What are the things that you want to do but ...

Cyrus: The fact that I want to go out with my friends, [the fact] that my mother does not have money, and I miss going out with them [i.e., his friends].

(. . .)

Researcher: Right. What difference would it make if you had more money?

Cyrus: The difference would be that my mother could buy a house, we would not have to pay rent, she would be comfortable shopping without needing to go back [again to the store] to pay or to wait for [help from] someone else. She would not be indebted to anyone, because, if Sophia [his sister] or I needed anything, she would give it to us.

(. . .)

Researcher: Are there some everyday things you are deprived of?

Cyrus: Sophia wants clothes, Ok she is a girl, she wants to go out, needs clothes, wants shirts, because you know girls are difficult, ‘I do not like this, I do not like that’, and she wants clothes. Ok, I can’t have enough clothes myself, I fall down, they are torn, but it is mostly Sophia who wants things.

Researcher: Are there other activities which you would want to do if you have more money?

Cyrus: Alright, I am satisfied with what I do. Alright I play football, but my sister wants to go and study Mathematics, to do her GCEs, but it is a lot of money and my mother does not have that money to pay, so she may have to stop [i.e., not go].

Researcher: How do you feel about this, the fact that she may stop doing something she wants to do?

Cyrus: If it was up to me, I would not allow it, because I know how much she wants to study mathematics, but it does not depend on me.

Finally, some of the children mentioned various toys/games they would like to have, or other things like mobile phones, bicycles, books and school materials, while some other children focused on travel and vacation, trips and excursions.

4.3.4. The Economics of Two Parent Families: In Comparison

When we asked the children from two parent families about their pocket money many of them said that they get about two to three pounds per day and that when they need extra money for school-related needs their parents give them more. The children who get breakfast at school get less money from their parents, about one pound. One group of children also stated that they get all the money they ask for, or even more than what they ask for, from their parents. Some children explained that their parents give them their pocket money at the beginning of the week and they themselves are responsible for how they spend it during the week, while others said that they get their pocket money every day. Older children stated that they get additional money from their parents on the weekends for their outings.

The children said that they spend their pocket money on small purchases at school, that is, for buying drinks, sandwiches, etc. Moreover, some children stated that they save some of the money they get in order to buy presents on anniversaries to their siblings or parents. Another group of children stated that they get extra money from their parents

when they help them in the family business. Some younger children mentioned that they may get some extra money from their brothers or sisters for small expenses, especially when they help those brothers or sisters with some chores they have to do, or provide them with other services or favors. Most of the children expressed their satisfaction with the pocket money they get which they feel is enough for their daily expenses.

Some parents from two parent families stated that for hygienic reasons they prepare their children's snacks at home and therefore the money they give their children is little, ranging from 50 cents to one pound. In spite of this, some working parents stated that they leave some money at home for the children to use in case of need while the parents are away from the home for a long time. Some others told us that they try to keep a limit to the money they give to their children and that they know the prices for the things the children buy, so they can check how their children spend their money. Some even said that they check their children's purse before and after school. Some of the parents also check on the money the children spend on weekends during their outings. Other parents said that their children save some of the money they give them, so sometimes, when the family goes on excursions together, the children may use that money to treat everybody or to spend on petrol for the car. Finally, a number of parents mentioned differences among their children concerning the management of the money they give them.

Parents from two parent families expressed various degrees of satisfaction /dissatisfaction about the family's economic situation. In those cases where only one of the two parents works, which is usually the case with larger families, the economic situation of the family appears to be quite difficult. These parents mentioned the economic pressures from having to pay for their children's private lessons and out of school activities, the everyday expenses, and the costs for basic necessities like clothing and shoes. They distinguished, however, between some months of the year when things are financially easier and other months when they face more difficulties. Many parents mentioned their children's demands for buying them certain things and particularly those demands which the parents, themselves, consider to be unreasonable like the purchase of mobile telephones. A larger number of parents state that they are moderately satisfied with their financial situation and describe how they try to manage their financial resources so as to avoid economic hardship. Finally some parents from two parent families seem to be quite satisfied with their finances and from the support

they receive from their parents and in-laws or from domestic workers they hire to help them.

When asked what they would do if they had more money, some of the women interviewees told us that they would like to stay at home and not work in order to be able to offer more to their children, while other women said that they would like to work half-day in order to be able to spend more time with their children in the afternoon. Some men who participated in the research also had similar comments and said that they would like their wives to stay at home and not to work so that they can care for their children. Other men, however, said that work is not a hindrance to spending time with the children since weekends are there especially for this purpose. Similarly, some parents felt that more money would not make them happy while others, recognize their mistake by pointing out that to make up for their absence from home because of work, they try to give their children more material goods. Finally, some parents from two parent families referred to travel and holidays as ways to satisfy their children but also referred to other creative ways to occupy children and keep them away from the dangers of society (e.g. drugs, alcohol, etc).

4.3.5. Summary

- For many single parent families, especially for those families where the single parent does not have a full time job, financial problems tend to be serious.
- Some single parent families face more financial difficulties when the absent parent fails to pay the legally obligated maintenance fee for the support of the children.
- Many single parent families face problems related to housing (e.g., cost of rent, inadequate space, etc).
- Many single parents face financial obligations arising from their previous family status (e.g., debts accrued, etc) which adds to the financial pressures that the family is facing.
- The transitional phase from a two parent family to a single parent family is financially difficult for many families.
- Single parent families often receive material (e.g., money, gifts, etc) and other support (e.g., transportation for children) from the extended family in order to cope with the financial pressures they face.

- Those single parent families who lack a family support network (e.g., because there are no members of the extended family living in close proximity) face more financial pressures.

Chapter 4.4: Support Networks

4.4.1. Introduction

Based on our discussions with children and parents who come from single parent families the majority of single parent families receive significant support from their 'extended' family-kin members (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc). The function of a single parent family and children's and parent's well-being, after a death, divorce, or separation often depends on this kind of supportive relations of the single parent family with the members of the extended family. On the other hand, the support that children receive from the professional organizations dealing with single parent families is very limited. Yet, those children who have received such support report being satisfied with the services they receive.

4.4.2. Single Parent Families' Relations with Extended Family Members

The support that children receive from their own family-kin environments operates at three different levels: the personal, the functional, and the financial. At the personal level, as many children reported, uncles and aunts, grandmothers and grandfathers talk to the children during the first transitional stage from a two parent family to a single parent family offering in this way a kind of psychological support to them. This kind of support, of course, is not restricted during this first transitional stage but often continues for long periods of time. A 15 year old girl from urban Nicosia, Savia, whose parents divorced years ago, explained, "When we have a problem, my uncles and aunts help us. I have an aunt, especially, let's say, who always helps us a lot. Whatever the problem, she will help us and we always manage to solve our problems". This personal dimension also includes the regular contacts and communication between children and their relatives, which may include family visits, outings, and telephone communication. Additionally, when we asked children to whom they turn when they have a problem, a number of younger children reported that they turn to their brothers and sisters. As children themselves put it, when a family member faces a problem it is a concern for the whole family. This mutual support between siblings in single parent families is not strictly restricted to this personal dimension but also takes a functional and financial character as well. For example, older children help their younger brothers and sisters with their transportation needs and lend them money.

The greatest support that a single parent family receives from kin members seems to take, according to children's reports, a functional dimension. The functional dimension includes: children's transportation to and from school, child caring, repairing of children's toys or other personal and household equipment, etc. This dimension does not exclude the other two dimensions. For example, when grandparents help with children's transportation needs they, at the same time, also help the single parent family financially since transportation costs in both money and time and secondly engage with the children in a personal level since they are in regular contact with them. Single parents reported during our focus group discussions that caring for their children while they work or go out is usually undertaken by members of their extended family such as parents and siblings. Additionally, some of the single parents reported that their children can take care of themselves and stay at home on their own when they themselves are absent. However, a group of single parents faces serious problems with child care either because their parents died, or because their parents live far away, or because their parents are really old and cannot help with child caring. Ms. Sonia, a divorced mother from rural Nicosia explains:

In my case, I don't have anyone to leave the kids with because my mother is an old woman and she can't really take care of them; this only happened in the past once or twice. Kids are smacking each other and because of this nobody wants to take the responsibility of caring for them, and it really becomes difficult for me. I don't have someone who I can trust and once when I left the kids because I had to go somewhere, their father immediately made an issue out of it saying that I leave the kids without adequate security.

Children's safety seems to be a really important issue for those single parents who do not have any relatives to help them with child caring when they are absent from home. In those cases when children stay at home on their own, parents are in constant communication with them through phone or go from work to home and from home to work to make sure that their children are well. Those single parents who live with their own parents so that they can have child care while at work or out end up finding that their parents intervene in their personal lives.

Finally, at the financial level, the children reported receiving direct or indirect financial support from the extended family. When support is given to children directly, it is usually in the form of a present. The financial support that is given from extended family members to single parent family members may include household equipment or

food for the daily needs of the single family. However, not all single parent families receive financial support from their extended family or kin members. It is important to point out that the relations of children, following a divorce or separation, with family and kin members of the absent parent are usually negatively affected. As a result, children neither meet with these relatives nor do they receive support from them.

4.4.3. Professional Support as Experienced by Single Parent Families

Professional support for single parent family members is vital for the well-being of both children and parents. Professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, school counsellors, and teachers, can provide children and parents with the necessary support to move on with their personal and family lives and to cope with the difficulties they face after a divorce, separation, death, or abandonment. The greatest number of children, however, from both urban and rural Nicosia and Limassol said that they had never visited a professional for support. Some other children reported that they have seen a professional only once while others reported that their parents are those that usually are in touch with a professional, a social worker for example, but not themselves. Though children have the opportunity to talk with a professional at school, they choose not to and prefer to talk to friends, relatives or other people they know. It seems that a number of children have some preconceived ideas or biases against professionals and question their abilities and their professional competence. Leo, a 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, explains:

I don't want to visit any psychologists because you always hear so much and if you go [to them] you end up becoming totally confused. For example, my friends are telling me to love my dad, some others are telling me that I should stop talking to him since he behaved in that way, some others are telling me different things, they don't really leave you in peace... If you also visit the psychologist, you end up doing everything, and you really become crazy... I only listen to my best friend because he is the only one who went through the things that I am experiencing now.

Some of the children who visited professionals feel that professionals do not really understand them or that they see their needs and demands as unreasonable. However, the majority of children who received support from professionals, for one or the other reason, express their satisfaction with the support they received. Children who received help from professionals report that they succeeded in overcoming difficult times, in feeling better, and felt comfortable in talking face to face with them or over the phone. A number of children coming from single parent families receive help from the

available services at school and feel satisfied with the quality of this support. However, some children who are probably in need of such support, are discouraged from using such services because there is a prevailing perception in schools that the students who visit school counsellors are visiting them in order to skip classes. It is also important to mention that some children reported receiving help from some of their teachers. These children believe that these teachers really care about them, that they are polite, and that they, as students, feel comfortable to talk to them about the problems that they face.

4.4.4. Professionals' Understanding of Single Parent Families

Professionals working with single parent families, such as school counsellors, educational psychologists, and social workers, defined a 'single parent family' as the family where one of the parents is absent from home and the children grow up with only one parent in the home. However, some professionals offer a variety of other definitions as well. A social worker, for example, believes that the term refers only to those cases where the father is absent. In her own words, "divorced families are not included in our term of the single parent family. A single parent family is the family in which the mother is unmarried, or the father died, or the father abandoned the family, or the father lives abroad and he doesn't contact the family but not the divorced families, no". In contrast, some psychologists and school counsellors provided more expanded definitions including a variety of family types such as the divorced, the separated, the widowed, and those families where one or the other parent is absent from home for long periods of time.

The educational background of the professionals working with single parent families includes basic or advanced studies in social work, psychology, sociology, or counselling. The majority of professionals reported that they have not specialized on issues concerning single parent families pinpointing that it is their past experiences with single parent families which helps them deal with the problems that these families confront.

Professionals identify a number of problems in relation to single parenthood. They told us that children coming from different family types do not seem to be prejudiced or to reveal stereotypical behaviors against children who come from single parent families. They also told us that it is the teachers who usually categorized children based on their

family status in their attempts to explain inappropriate behaviors or poor performance of some of their students. They made clear to us that other children do not see single parent children negatively. They also added that in rural areas, children are likely to adopt their parents' perceptions about single parent families; specifically, one of them said, "Children mirror their parents' views, views which are clearly adult views transferred to children".

Professionals, in their majority, told us that children who come from single parent families do not differ in any significant way from children who come from other family types. What follows are a couple of reports from professionals in relation to these differences:

There are no differences between children. Kids coming from single parent families are as normal as the other kids. They don't seem to have any particular problems.

There are children who don't face particular problems but it depends on how the single parent confronts his or her child.

According to professionals, it seems that divorced parents are becoming more and more acceptable from the wider society because of the increasing divorces during the last couple of years. At the same time, however, unmarried mothers are less acceptable than divorced mothers. Consider the following reported by a professional:

Prejudices exist especially toward unmarried mothers. Children from such family compositions and their mothers as well are likely to experience serious problems from the wider society. For example, mothers usually face problems in finding a job. I believe that people view such persons as unable to organize and structure their lives.

As professionals explained, single mothers in rural areas are likely to experience more problems than single mothers in urban areas. Some complain that they are stigmatized because of their family status, that others gossip about them or discriminate against them.

Professionals believe that children's emotional shock after a death, divorce or separation causes most of the problems that children experience. The absence of a parent from

home results in a new family arrangement causing changes in children's everyday life. Also, children, according to the professionals, lack a parental model because of this absence. Moreover, single mothers are often absent from home working for long hours thus further impacting children's lives. Some professionals believe that some single mothers are unable to deal with important family problems or to determine the boundaries of their children's behavior something which results in them becoming delinquent. Children often feel rejected from the absent parent and transfer this kind of feeling to school something that is often expressed as anger. Lack of communication between single mothers and their children is the source of many of children's problems, some professionals believe. When conflicting situations arise between single parents and children, children develop problematic behaviors. They become reactive, aggressive, and introvert. In cases of divorce, children's problems tend to diminish as time goes by and as parental conflicts decrease despite the fact that financial problems very often continue.

Though they point out that children from single parent families do not necessarily face particular problems, professionals believe that the absence of a parent from home and the lack of a parental model means that something is missing from children's lives. Children's emotional needs are considered to be the most important thing in children's lives. They believe that children need understanding, support, and empowerment because they tend to be, though not always, susceptible to risk. Financial needs seem to be less important than emotional needs, according to professionals, but because single parent families lose an income they face a number of financial problems in fulfilling the needs of the family like the fees for children's extra-curriculum classes, children's entertainment, and their after school activities. Finally, some children, according to professionals' understanding, perform poorly at school but again this is often connected with their emotional state of being. As one of them explained, "When their academic performance is poor, I say that it is because of the lack of the parental model, the lack of parental warmth". Nevertheless, children's school performance often depends on a variety of personal factors, as they added.

Professionals attribute a number of factors that they believe may result in the disfunctioning of a single parent family, as follows: lack of quality time and effective communication between single parents and children, emotional load, conflicting

situations among single parent family members, interventions of society in single parents' lives, financial problems, etc.

The services that service organizations provide to single parent families vary. Educational psychologists who visit schools, for example, usually function as advisors rather than counsellors who can provide therapeutic treatment to children because the Department of Educational Psychology of the Ministry of Education and Culture is short staffed and therefore professionals are overloaded and unable to dedicate the time that is required for each individual case. In practice, they usually get in touch with both children and teachers providing guidance on how to overcome certain difficulties. School counsellors provide psychological and advisory support to children and their parents, in some cases, and sometimes intervene to help children when they have problems with their grades. In other words, in student evaluation and grading periods, they often inform teachers about their students' family status. School counsellors also ask help from educational psychologists when necessary.

School counsellors also provide psychological help to students when they first experience the loss of the parent. When children reveal in confidence to school counsellors information placing their safety and well-being in danger, school counsellors are committed to inform the Department of Social Welfare or the Office of the Attorney General in order to intervene, accordingly. However, children's views and needs are always taken into consideration before acting, as the professionals explain.

As social workers reported during our discussions, the Department of Social Welfare often helps single parent families by providing house care to those families that need to overcome functional and organizational problems in their homes; they help with housework, cooking, and child care in an effort to assist the single parent family to achieve a level of stability and independence. Additionally, Social Services provide counselling, informative, preventive, and financial help to single parent families.

The Department of Social Welfare Services is also in collaboration with other professional organizations dealing with the provision of services to single parent families like the school counsellors, the educational psychologists, the health services, and the *Pancyprian Association of Single Parents and Friends*. Professionals themselves, however, reported a range of problems in their attempt to provide and

coordinate their services. For the development of the services provided to single parent families, they suggest: the employment of trained professionals, training of the existing staff of services, restructuring of their departments, provision of information to the public about single parenthood, and training of single parents. Some also suggested the establishment of a center for single parent families and child care facilities.

Finally, professionals agree that the views and suggestions of children who come from single parent families should be considered when decisions for policy making are made. A social worker, in fact, argued that the Department of Social Welfare emphasizes children's participation in decisions affecting their lives.

4.4.5. Children's and Parents' Suggestions for Improvement of Support Services

Children's suggestions for the improvement of support services provided to single parent families include: (1) access to social services when children need help (2) financial support, and (3) understanding of and response to their needs. Single parents as well as parents who come from two parent families add to the list a series of suggestions. Financial support is at the top of the list. Additionally, some parents believe that initiatives supporting single parent families should be aligned with the initiatives that the state adopted for other poor and socially excluded groups. More specifically, they suggest: support centres for parents and children, child care centers at low cost, training of teachers in handling children who come from single parent families, reduction of fees for children's extra classes, low interest loans for housing, equal treatment in hiring, reduction of working hours, longer maternal leaves, further development and better organization of the 'all-day school', flexible working schedules, emotional and psychological support for their children at school, permanent professionals in schools, and free access to health care.

Single parents believe that the State is absent and indifferent towards their problems. They feel that service organizations treat them unfairly. This kind of treatment from the State raises single parents' anger and annoyance. Many of them, also report, that they are in a state of despair. Finally, some single parents believe that the existing European standards of supporting single parent families should be urgently implemented in Cyprus as well.

4.4.6. Summary

- Most children from single parent families say that they have never used professional support (e.g., psychologists, social workers, etc).
- Most children from single parent families are negatively predisposed towards getting help from a professional because they do not think that professionals can really help them.
- Those children from single parent families who have received support from professionals say that they are happy with the support they received.
- Children from single parent and two parent families suggest the following in order to improve the lives of single parent families: easier access to services when they need help; increased financial assistance by the state; creation of community centers; affordable child care; training of teachers on issues related to single parent families; lower fees for extra lessons for children who come from single parent families; opportunities for lower-rate housing loans; flexible work schedules and free health care.
- Parents' Associations often provide financial assistance to needy children irrespective of family background.
- Educational psychologists provide psychological support to children who need it though the service is severely understaffed giving rise to a slow response.
- Educational counsellors provide psychological support to children who need it and refer children to educational psychologists.
- Social workers provide counselling, informative and preventive counselling to single parent families, in-house care where necessary, child care in public child care facilities, and provide referrals of specific cases of children to the Psychiatric Services.
- Professionals suggest the increase of qualified staff, the establishment of preventive programs, the organization of awareness campaigns for the public, seminars for parents, and the further coordination of and collaboration between government departments.

Chapter 4.5: Friends, Peers, Relatives and Neighbors

4.5.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the social interactions and relationships of children who come from single parent families. We explore how children experience their relations with friends and peers and the activities they are engaged in with them. At the same time, the chapter investigates children's relations with family members and neighbors. In addition, we make an attempt to understand the social interactions of children who come from single parent families with other children from the same family type as well as with children who come from different family types. Finally, the chapter describes how aware children and adults who come from two parent families are about single parent families and the problems that such families face in their everyday lives.

4.5.2. Peer Group Composition: Criteria for Inclusion

Children and adolescents from single parent families state that some of their friends come from single parent families while others come from two parent families. The same is reported also by children who come from two parent families as well as single parents. Some children from single parent families say that they share their personal and family problems with those of their friends who have or had in the past similar problems with them because they feel that only these children can really understand them. On the other hand, single parents believe that bringing children and single parents together with other single parent families may help children to develop further their communication skills, feel more comfortable, and express themselves more easily. The majority of children who come from single parent families, however, feel quite differently: family type does not define their relations, and the people they trust, open up to and talk to about their problems. Another group of children said that family problems remain within their families and that they do not really talk to others about them.

In short, it can be said that family type is not a key criterion for determining children's relations with other children. Other factors such as children's common interests, children's personalities, and proximity may influence children's relationships with others, the quality of their relationships, and their activities.

4.5.3. Children's Time with Friends and Peers

Children's activities with friends vary. According to their reports, children may engage in one or more of the following activities with their friends: visits to each other's houses, get-togethers in neighborhoods, walks, sports such as football and swimming, playing with electronic or table games, conversations on serious or less serious issues, joke telling, going out for lunch or dinner, parties, meetings in youth sport clubs, cinema, bowling, TV, texting messages and exchanging music files on their mobile phones, cycling, helping each other with homework, etc. Some children in rural areas explained how their friendships are affected as a result of their friends' families moving to the cities and complained about their difficulties in accessing regional centers or city centers for entertainment. Children suggested specific measures to discourage further family movements from rural to urban areas such as the development of youth centers and the organization of cultural and social events in rural areas.

Some adolescents who come from single parent families reported that they do not really go out or they do not go out as much as they would have wanted to for financial reasons. Instead of going out with their friends, they stay at home or in their neighborhoods to play, walk, and talk with their friends. Consider the following comment from Minas, a 16 year old boy from urban Nicosia: "If my friends will go to places where you have to pay to get in, I don't go. If they go out to eat, I go with them but they eat and I watch them". This is an example of how financial issues may affect children's social interactions with friends and peers. It is important to mention, however, that single parents often deprive themselves many things in life in order to provide their children with things like clothing, food, and entertainment.

4.5.4. Children's Relations with Relatives

The relations of children who come from single parent families with relatives appear to be good. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many single parent families rely upon the support provided by their extended family and kin members. Most of the children who come from single parent families reported that they are happy with the relationships they have with their relatives and that their relatives know about their problems and try to help and support them. It seems that uncles and aunts play a very important role in children's lives; they talk to children during difficult periods of their

lives and manage to make them feel better and overcome their problems. Children reported that occasionally conflicts and misunderstandings are likely to emerge in their relations with their relatives but these conflicts are rarely based on their family status. A few children reported relations with relatives which appear to be unimportant. Out of the most important relations the children reported was with their grandparents. Most of the children who participated in the study expressed their satisfaction with the support and the relations that they have with their grandmothers and grandfathers. Some children said that the relations with their relatives from the side of the absent parent are negatively affected after a divorce or separation. In some cases, children's relations with the relatives of the absent parent break off after separation or divorce.

4.5.5. Children's Social Interactions with Neighbors

Children's reports on social interactions with neighbors could be divided in four categories. The first category includes those children who said they do not really know their neighbors. The second category concerns children who do not have any relations with their neighbors because they have some kind of conflict, for one or the other reason, with their neighbors. The third category includes children who say their neighbors support their single parent family with material goods or in other ways. And the fourth category includes those children who express suspicion towards their neighbors. Children in this last category feel that their neighbors gossip about their family behind their backs.

4.5.6. Children and Parents from Two Parent Families and their Understandings of Single Parent Families

Children and parents from two parent families have been asked, during focus groups, to discuss what they know about single parent families and the problems they face in their everyday lives. The most important issue which both groups mentioned was the financial issue and other related issues like housing. More specifically, the two groups reported the following as problems that single parent family members confront: (1) remarriage of one of the parents and the ways that children's lives may be affected as a result, (2) parental conflicts and children's insecurities in such cases, (3) the custody procedures and the time that the absent parent spends with his or her children, (4) children's sadness after parents live apart, and (5) the psychological traumas of children after a death or a divorce. Some children also talked about fathers' and sons' relations

assuming that boys need the role model of the father when they grow up. A few children reported that they do not really see any problems in single parent families while a few others reported that the problems of single parent families are the same with the problems of two parent families. Children from two parent families also reported that the way they behave towards children from single parent families is the same as the way they behave towards other children. Some children who come from two parent families say that they feel the need to support children who come from single parent families. Finally, many children who come from two parent families acknowledge the difficulties that children who come from single parent families may face in fulfilling their future plans.

Despite the fact that parents who come from two parent families seem to know and understand how single parent families experience their everyday lives and despite the fact that they seem to be sensitive enough about their life conditions and challenges, they also indirectly express some critical comments on the ways single parents raise their children. For example, some people said that single parents are unable to control their children's behaviors, their children's relations with other children, and their whereabouts because of the increased family and job responsibilities that they encounter after a loss, separation, or divorce. On the other hand, some people had a different understanding. For example, a mother who comes from a two parent family explained:

I believe that kids with only one parent are stronger than other kids. They are more protected, let's say. The mother takes better care of them than we do because we often say that fathers should also take responsibilities but we let them get away with it. Most kids who have only one parent are more protected... they learn how to live on their own and they set priorities in their lives, they are stronger.

For some parents who come from two parent families, custody arrangements sound incomprehensible. For example, a father told us that he cannot really understand how a father stands to see his children once every now and then. Some others told us that they cannot really have regular contacts with single parent families because they have to be at all times aware of the language they use. As a father from a two parent family explained:

...It's like you bother them. You have to be careful about what your kids say to these kids. Sometimes kids say 'my father does this' or 'my father takes me

there' and you know that the father of this kid has left. You therefore try to see them rarely. You cannot have regular contact with them.

4.5.7. Treatment of Single Parent Families by Friends and Their Parents

Despite the fact that most children and parents from single parent families report that children and parents from two parent families treat them fairly and in the right way, a small group of children appear to be upset with the way others treat them. For example, an orphan boy said that he feels tired with his classmates' ongoing questions about his father's death. Another boy who comes from a two parent family described the problems which a friend of his faces after the loss of his father, the way he burst out in class and the harsh way his classmates treat him. Some single parents also complained about how others treat them while other single parents appeared surprised on how well other people treat them. Some children from single parent families are quite upset not with what others say but with the way that they relate to them as children from single parent families. For example, Leo, a 15 year old boy from rural Limassol, explained: "Some people adopt a way like they feel sorry about you". It is clear that children do not need the pity of anyone but proper treatment and support. Finally, it is important to mention that none of the children who come from single parent families reported inappropriate treatment from the parents of their friends.

4.5.8. Summary

- Children from single and two parent families say that family status is not a criterion in their friendships.
- Children and parents from two parent families seem to know what the life situations and problems of single parent families are.
- Some parents from two parent families express their doubts as to whether the children from single parent families grow up in the 'proper way' given that they grow up with only one parent who cannot exercise adequate control over them.
- In general, and with few exceptions, the relations between children and parents from single parent families and their extended families, friends, and neighbors are good.

Chapter 4.6: Future

The opinions of children of single parent families with regards to their future differed greatly. Many children said that they would like to be able to help their families financially in the future. A fourteen year old girl said: “Okay, when I find a job I would like to be able to help my family financially.” Also, many children said they would like to continue living with their parents in the future so that their parents would not feel lonely. A fifteen year old boy explained: “I would just like us all to get a qualification and find a job because that is what counts more (. . .) then we will build a house here and my mom won’t be left alone.” Finally, an eleven year old boy similarly pointed out: “Well, we will stay at the same house. I will stay with my family in this house as well as with my mom and I will take care of my uncle.”

Most of the children mentioned the different professions that they would like to follow in the future such as: chef, teacher, beautician, military officer, etc. Some of the children of single parent families said that they see a bright future for themselves and that they will have a very good life. As a twelve year old girl explained: “I feel that things will become much better. I mean that we will live a more comfortable life, we will have a good job, we will be better off. For the time being we do not have a life.” However, at the same time, some children could not speak about their future while some other ones said that their future looked “dull.” Quite a few children said that the financial issue was the most important factor which could put up barriers to their future while some others expressed their concern about their family’s debts. A sixteen year old girl explained: “I see my future dull because let’s say I would like to get a higher education, however, you have to think how this will add to family’s expenses (...) and that maybe I do not have the financial ability to pursue higher education studies and this is something that bothers you very much (...) this is something that definitely makes you feel really bad.”

Finally, some children hope for a change in their family status, that is, going back to a two parent family, like they used to have. As a ten year old girl explained, she would be very happy if her father came back: “If my dad comes back I think we will be a very happy family (...) my mom’s and dad’s divorce was the only bad thing that happened to us.”

CHAPTER 5: Analysis of Primary and Secondary Textbooks and Curriculum Guides

The following textbooks have been examined for the purposes of this project which include books used in both primary and secondary public schools (i.e., the six years of primary school and the first three years of secondary school):

For primary education (for children 6-12 years old):

1. Η Γλώσσα μου (My Language). A series of reading books in the Greek language for the first to sixth grades of primary school. Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, Edition 2002 – 2004.
2. Ιστορία της Κύπρου, Leontiou, N. & Ioannides, P. F., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Edition 2006.
3. Ο Άνθρωπος και η Ιστορία του (for the 3rd grade). Stavrides, M., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Edition 2006. Ο Άνθρωπος και η Ιστορία του (for the 4th grade). Hoplaros, G., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Edition 2006.
4. Ανθολόγιο για το Δημοτικό, Μέρος Α'. Cypriot Anthology of Literature for Primary Schools, Part I. Stassinopoulos, M. and Savvides, G. Organization for Edition of School Books, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, 30th edition, 2004.
5. Με τη Χάρη του Χριστού. Religious book for the 1st grade. Stavrides, M., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 1997. Η Ζωή με το Χριστό (for the 3rd grade). Ο Δρόμος του Χριστού (for the 4th grade). Με το Χριστό στον Αγώνα (for the 5th grade, Melas, D. & Nikas, A., Pedagogical Insititute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece.
6. Γνωρίζω το Περιβάλλον μου, Environment/ Geography book (for the 3rd grade), Papadopoulos, A. Γνωρίζω το Περιβάλλον μου (for the 4th grade), Ioannides, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Edition 2006.
7. Γνωρίζω τον Κόσμο (for the 5th grade). Γνωρίζω τον Κόσμο (for the 6th grade). Geography Books, Leontiou, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Edition 2006.
8. Γίνομαι Καλός Πολίτης (for the 5th and 6th grades), Citizenship Education, Karageorgis, A., G., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Edition 2006.
9. Μαθηματικά – Mathematics (for the 1st grade), Leontiou, N.
Μαθηματικά “ (for the 2nd grade, Stavrides, M.
Μαθηματικά “ (for the 3rd grade), Stavrides, M.
Μαθηματικά “ (for the 4th grade), Stavrides, M.
Μαθηματικά “ (for the 5th grade), Stavrides, M.
Μαθηματικά “ (for the 6th grade), Nicolaides, S.
Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2006.
10. Εμείς και ο Κόσμος για Α' μέχρι Στ' τάξη (We and the World - Study of the Environment (for the 1st to the 6th grades). Organization for Editing of School Books, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Edition 2003 and 2004

11. Βλέπω το Σημερινό Κόσμο, θεματικό βιβλίο, (subjects for discussion), Matsaggouras, E. Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece 2004.
12. Βλέπω το Σημερινό Κόσμο, Δημιουργικές- διαθεματικές δραστηριότητες (interdisciplinary subjects), Matsaggouras, E., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece 2004.

For secondary education (for children 12-15 year old):

1. Νεοελληνική Γλώσσα για το Γυμνάσιο, Α', Β', Γ' τεύχος, Μπαλάσκας, Κ., Reading books in Modern Greek Literature (for 1st to 3rd grades of secondary schools.) Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece. Editions 2002-2004.
2. Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας Α' τάξη, βιβλίο μαθητή. Readings in Modern Greek Literature (for the 1st grade), Student's Book, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Cyprus Republic, 2nd Edition, 2005.
3. Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας (for the 2nd grade), Veikou, C., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece.
4. Ιστορία (workbook) (for the 1st grade), Kolios, C., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 6th edition, 2000.
5. Ιστορία (Workbook) (for the 3rd grade). History, Sepos A. and Eliopoulos, P., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education, Cyprus Republic, 6th edition 2000.
6. Ιστορία της Κύπρου (History of Cyprus), Papastavrou, A., and Antoniadis, L., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 3rd Edition 1995.
7. Ταξίδι στη Γη μας (Travel on Our Earth), Geography books for the 1st grade, Christou, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 6th Edition, 2004.
8. Ταξίδι στην Ευρώπη Travel in Europe (Geography Book) (for the 2nd grade), Georgiades, C., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2nd Edition, 2004.
9. Γεωγραφία της Κύπρου (Geography of Cyprus), Christou, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2nd edition, 2003.
10. Σχεδιασμός και Τεχνολογία (Design and Technology), Books and Workbooks (for the 1st grade), Meleties, A., 2001. For the 2nd and 3rd grades, Efthymiou G. and Papanastasiou, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, Trial Edition 2005
11. Ερευνώ τη Φύση (Searching Nature), Georgiades, C., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 1994.
12. Προετοιμασία του Ανθρώπου για τον Καινούργιο Κόσμο του Θεού (Religious book for the 1st grade), Nikas, A., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, 2005.
13. Ιησούς Χριστός και ο Καινούργιος Κόσμος του Θεού (Religious book for the 2nd grade, Nikas, A., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, 1999.

14. Εκκλησία της Κύπρου, Μαρτύριο και Ζωή (Religious books for the 3rd grade), Fotiou, A. and Cleanthous, K., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2nd Edition 2000.
15. Παγκόσμια Ιστορία Τέχνης, Α τόμος (World History of Art, Aesthetics Appreciation of Works of Art (1st volume) Papadopoulou, N., 1995, 3rd volume, 1st Official Edition 2005, Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of education, Cyprus Republic.
16. Οικιακή Οικονομία για την Α' τάξη (Home Economics for the 1st grade), Hadjiassemi, A., 5th Edition, 2002.
Οικιακή Οικονομία (for the 2nd grade), Hadjiassemi, A., 2nd edition 2004.
Οικιακή Οικονομία (for the 3rd grade), Hadjiassemi, A., 2nd Edition 2004, Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic.
17. Ανθρωπολογία- Αγωγή Υγείας για την Β' τάξη (Anthropology, Health Education (2nd grade), Geordiades, C., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 1995.
18. Χημεία για την Β' τάξη (Chemistry for the 2nd grade), Poullis, G., Curriculum Development service, Ministry of education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2001.
19. Πολιτική Αγωγή για την Γ' τάξη (Citizenship Education for the 3rd grade), Kolios, C. and Ierokipiotis, K., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 3rd Edition, 2004.
20. Επαγγελματική Αγωγή για την Γ' τάξη (Career Counseling for the 3rd grade), Vassiliou, M., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus republic, 3rd Edition, 2004.
21. Ανθολόγιο Κυπριακής Λογοτεχνίας (Anthology of Cypriot Literature), Fylactou, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education, Cyprus Republic, 1990.
22. Ηροδότου Ιστορίαι (for the 2nd grade) Herodotus' stories, Balaskas, K., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, 2003.
23. Μουσική για την Β' και Γ' τάξη (Music book for the 2nd and 3rd grades, Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece.
24. Ομήρου Ιλιάδα (Homer's Iliad for the 1st grade), Argyropoulou, C., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, 2005.

5.1. Family in Primary School Texts

5.1.1. General

The primary school books include multiple references to families. The family is usually depicted mostly in the traditional sense: two parents with two or three children and often surrounded by grandparents or aunts and uncles. Families are not only described in passages but are also presented in pictures or alluded to in relation to references regarding visits, careers as well as in mathematical problems.

With some exceptions, families usually seem to be well-to-do economically. Family members usually carry out traditional roles, that is, mothers cater for their children, for the house, and cook while fathers work in order to provide. There are some references to working women but their jobs (unlike men's jobs) are not described.

Primary school texts contain a few references to single parent families. The usual theme of single-parent family references is that one parent has died or the father is away working. In some of the more recent books some allusion is made to small families as well as single parent families. In these references, the importance of the family, feelings of loss, affection among family members, protection of one another and support are underlined.

5.1.2. The family as an Institution and the Traditional Family

In religious books, the family is shown as the institution responsible for teaching “life in love” and for preparing children for society. More precisely, in religious books the whole family attends church masses (Με τη χάρη του Χριστού for the 1st grade, p.54), brings flowers to the grave in the cemetery, and prays for the souls of the dead (Η Ζωή με το Χριστό for 3rd grade p. 149). Within this framework the family is blessed by God and lives in love (Με την Αγάπη του Χριστού for the 3rd grade, part III, p. 80-81). The bonds of the family are not weakened even when the father has to be away for long because of his job and the emotions expressed by the mother and the children are evidence of that (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, part II, p. 57).

In one of the books, a child psychiatrist defines and describes family as a socializing agent («Βλέπω το Σημερινό Κόσμο», Matsaggouras, E., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, 2004, pp. 29-35). In the same reading, the rights of children and the expression of emotions are discussed.

Parental care and family bonds are presented for the younger children through the life of birds (e.g., pictures with parent birds bringing food to the young in the nest) (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 1st grade, unit E3). Similarly, parental care of the young is shown through references to mammals (same reference).

5.2. The Various Social Roles in the Family

5.2.1. The Mother

The mother's relationship with the children is drawn in literary texts where an almost divine presence is shown, e.g., Kazantzakis' mother is almost sanctified (Η Γλώσσα μου, 6th year, pp. 75-76, Organization for Editing School Books, 2004). Admirable emotions are presented by children to their parents (with love expressed between son and mother in Κυπριακό Ανθολόγιο, part II, pp.95-98 and with a hymn to the father by a girl, p. 147). In some passages, the mother is presented caring for her children and family, e.g., she participates with the father in protecting the children (Γίνομαι καλός Πολίτης for the 5th grade, p.41-42). The mother monitors the children's behaviour out of the home and on one occasion the child cheats and goes out to fly a kite (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 4th grade, part IV, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, pp. 32-33).

In a picture in one of the reading books the mother attends to the sick child (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 1st grade, unit A3) and students are invited to discuss it. The mother also shows a lot of feeling and her emotions are visible on her face as when she sheds a lot of tears for those gone overseas (Η Γλώσσα μου for 6th year. P.114) or when a letter arrives that the father is returning back to the country (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 2nd grade, part II, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, p.57).

In many books, we also frequently see that mother taking care of the home and preparing the food (either in text or in pictures). In a reading from a religion book, for instance, the mother brings to the table the warm food and the grandfather announces the dinner by saying "let's eat" (Η Ζωή με το Χριστό for the 3rd grade, p.102).

5.2.2. The Father

The traditional role of the father is also well illustrated in many of the books. For instance, the role of the father as a protector of the family is exemplified when the father grouse advises and protects the little ones from the hunters (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 4th grade, part II, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece 2004, pp. 62-63), or when the father brings the family shopping home (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος, for the 1st grade, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2003, p.107). In many books, the

father's job is described and illustrated through particular work scenes, e.g., the mechanic (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 3rd grade, part 1, Organization for Editing School Books, 2004), the driver, the sailor, the builder (e.g., picture in Εμείς και ο Κόσμος, for the 1st grade, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, p. 109). In contrast, the mother's job outside the home is never shown with rare exceptions, e.g., once she is shown in a picture on a tractor next to the father (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος, for the 1st grade, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2003, Unit A3). In the reading books, the father also rarely helps with family responsibilities. In one passage, the father is shown cooking because he is on leave from work and he is therefore helping the mother prepare the dinner given that she is also working (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, part III pp. 56-57). On another occasion, he is shown as the one issuing the prohibitions towards the children (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 5th grade, part IV, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, p. 115-116).

In Mathematics books an even more traditional family is presented as compared to the rest of the books. Here, apart from the content on mathematical thinking, the authors are taken "off guard", so to speak, giving, may be, less importance to the examples they give of who buys, sells, gives money, etc. In these books, the mother is usually concerned with cooking, buying food and other supplies, and students have to calculate quantities of food, purchases, and money (e.g., Mathematics for the 2nd grade, part I, p. 42; Mathematics for the 2nd grade, part II, p. 38). The purchases of the mother are almost invariably kitchen supplies and more rarely electrical appliances or presents for her children. In one exercise, a mother sends money to her daughter, who is a student abroad (Mathematics for the 5th grade, part III, p. 90). The father on the other hand works, owns shops or owns a farm (Mathematics for the 4th grade, part IV, p. 85) and makes bigger purchases like cars (Mathematics for the 4th grade, part II, p. 75). An exception to this pattern of traditional roles is when a mother is presented as buying things for her office (Mathematics for the 3rd grade, part IV, p. 79), and when three female teachers are described (Mathematics for the 6th grade, part II, p. 97). Another exception to this pattern is when a girl is described as training in sports (Mathematics for the 6th grade, part I, p. 17).

The theme of family bonds is also prevalent in mathematics books. For instance, four and five member-families are presented as buying things together or two children from the same family are presented as putting money together to buy a present for their father

(Mathematics for the 3rd grade, part II, p. 70). Other examples include family trips to town or common vacation for all family members (Mathematics for the 5th grade, part I, p. 17).

5.2.3. The Family in History

The teacher's guide points out a number of themes to be discussed in the classroom: the needs of families and members, terms and rules in the family, the roles of family members. Traditional roles of family members are shown in historically older times (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 2nd grade, Curriculum Guide, p. 15) but comparisons are to be made with modern times by the teacher (same curriculum guide).

5.2.4. The Modern Family

There are a number of passages in books where the family has more modern attitudes, as for instance, when both parents are shown supporting and providing for their children (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 1st grade, part II, p. 55) or when both parents are shown working (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 1st grade, part I, p. 146). One of the curriculum guides (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 1st year, Curriculum Guide, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2003, p. 38), gives instructions to teachers to discuss both families where the mother only works in the home and families where the mother works outside the home. In one of the readings, the father is the one who wakes up his children in the morning (Η Γλώσσα μου for 3rd year, part I, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece 2004, p.28).

Mothers and fathers are shown interacting with their children and socializing them. For instance, they are shown explaining to children the facts about babies and a mother is shown explaining museum exhibits to her daughter, (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, part III, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece 2004). Similarly, parents are shown playing like children as for instance, in the passage where they play teachers and pupils (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 1st grade, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, p.130).

Difficulties in family relationships do appear in some of the passages, as in the passage where the parents have a fight which continues for days. The child tries to get their

attention but this does not remedy the coldness and the conflict. The passage emphasizes the emotions expressed by the child (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, part II, Organization for Editing School Books 2004 pp. 59-60). In another reading, all family members are stubborn and they cannot decide where to go! (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, part II, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, pp. 30-31).

The father is presented as a sensitive and emotional human being in some readings, being for instance proud of the baby and explaining why the baby is crying (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, part III, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece 2004, pp. 22-23). Elsewhere the father is affectionate and sensitive to the needs of his children. For instance, he makes sure that the goat bred by the family is not slaughtered in the back yard for Easter but is exchanged for meat at the butcher thus being sensitive to his children's feelings (Ανθολόγιο for primary schools part II, Stasinopoulos-Savvides, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece 2004 pp. 54-55). In many of the readings, the father has a good relationship with his son or daughter, e.g., the child asks the father with trust and the father explains to the child very nicely (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 3rd grade, part I, p. 72-73).

Cruelty and kindness towards animals is shown and discussion is invited in the reading books. For instance, in one passage the father asks: Why would you kill the worm? (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 3rd grade, part I, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, p. 49) apparently anticipating the issue of violence.

Children do appear to present situations and feelings from their own perspective, e.g., a child accompanies the father on an airplane to the island of origin; a child home alone is waiting for and welcoming the mother who returns (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 2nd grade, part I, Organization for Editing School Books, 2004); a child is waiting for the return of the father who is a sailor; a child is waiting for the return of his grandfather who is missing since the Turkish Invasion of 1974 in Cyprus (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 2nd grade, part II, Organization for Editing School books, Greece, 2004, p. 83).

The passages “Everybody Works” and “Everybody Helps” in a reading book, depict the contemporary Cypriot family in everyday life with the grandmother comparing this life with the time of her own youth when only women laid the table (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 1st grade, part I, p. 146). In another passage, the need of child care when parents are at

work is explained to the child who asks why the mother needs to be away from the home during week-days (Με τον Χριστό στον Αγώνα for the 5th grade, p. 164-165).

Children are shown the importance of the family when it functions as a team with everybody contributing and helping (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 1st grade, Part I, p. 146). This is also presented in the environment books: “The family is a team where all live together, work together, and help one another. How do you help in your home?” (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 2nd grade, p. 15). Relations of support by the married couple are also shown in books. For instance in one passage, a couple, in spite of being old and nagging the message that comes across is one of support and concern: “don’t lean too much to the front; your blood pressure will go up” (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 3rd grade, part I, p. 48).

Finally, the roles of family members during various stages in history and in modern times are discussed in one of the environment books where students are invited to discuss differences between these older families and present-day families (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 2nd grade, Curriculum Guide, p. 15).

In the reading books, grandparents are often presented together with their grandchildren offering love and support, e.g., Irene asks questions and the grandmother patiently answers them (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 1st grade, Part II, pp. 94-95). In another passage, the grandparents bring up a child, after his parents have emigrated overseas (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, Part II, p. 57).

Some sex education is hinted through the animal world as a cat is shown with kittens in her womb in one picture and then in another picture nursing the born kitten (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 1st grade, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2003, Unit A3) and through discussion of Internet sites where sex is discussed asking the question “Is it right that one should know everything?” (Βλέπω το Σημερινό Κόσμο, διαθεματικό βιβλίο Matsaggouras E. Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education, Greece, 2004).

5.2.5. Families with Economic Needs

In some of the books, families are shown in pictures from various countries for comparison and pictures with families in economic need are presented for comments (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 2nd grade, Curriculum Guide, p. 15). Similarly, economic difficulties are presented in the environment books, as well as cases where families have difficulty satisfying their members' needs, and discussion is invited (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 1st grade, Unit E3).

5.2.6. Moving to another house

Moving to another house is presented three times in reading books, either in a happy atmosphere (“we are moving to our new house”) (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 1st grade, Part II, p. 125) or as a necessary evil with the child having to adjust to the new (physical and social) environment (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 4th grade, Part IV, pp. 16-170).

5.2.7. Single parent Families

Single parent families are also shown (e.g., Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 2nd grade, p.18), and the teacher is invited to present them in a way that the children coming from such families will feel comfortable or so that “they may not feel disadvantaged” (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 2nd grade, Teacher’s Book, Organization for Editing School Books, 2003, p.15). The issue of single parent families is also placed in the framework of what issues demand our attention in needy communities, where needs cover economic hardships, diseases, catastrophes, and other social problems. The presentation starts with pictures which the children compare and discuss (Εμείς και ο Κόσμος for the 1st grade, Unit A4).

In the reading books, a family loses one of the parents or one of the children as a result of natural death or death in war. Sometimes a child loses both parents, in which case the grandparents usually take over (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 2nd grade, Part II, Organization for editing School Books, Greece, 2004). In one passage, both parents emigrate and the child stays behind with the grandparents (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, Part II, p. 57). In another passage, a mother full of tears announces that the father is coming back from Germany where he works (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 2nd grade, Part II, p. 57). Another reading shows the father driving a truck from one country to another,

and thinking about his family at home (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 3rd grade, Part II, p.30). In all these passages, however, no particular problems or economic difficulties are presented.

A reading brings the subject of a “new mother”, a step mother, who is introduced by the father and the passage is making it clear that this arrangement will work out (Η Γλώσσα μου, for the 4th grade, Part1, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece, 2004, pp. 44-45). Two more readings allude to such situations through animal life: a goat adopted by another mother (Η Γλώσσα μου for the 5th grade, Part IV, p. 50), a cookoo hatched and adopted by other birds (Ανθολόγιο, Part A, Stasinopoulos, Savvides, Organization for Editing School Books, Edition 2004, p. 159-160). A girl is supported by the community when she goes to church without her mother who is ill (the father is away) and this way she no longer “feels alone” (Ο δρόμος του Χριστού, Melas, D., for the 4th grade, Organization for Editing School Books, Greece 2002, p. 96).

5.2.8. Conclusion

Generally speaking, we see that primary school texts follow traditional lines, where families are (with exceptions) two parent families. There is no mention of economic difficulties (except that somebody else takes over). Problems, where they exist, concern loss (death) of father, mother, or children. There is rare allusion to step-parenting. The bonds in the family and the need for support and protection of the young are emphasized in some of the books. The family members’ roles are mainly traditional with the father working, the mother caring for the young (three exceptions where they all go to work), and with grandparents providing additional support. At certain points more modern roles are shown in the readings or discussed by the teacher with some texts or pictures as a starting point. Both parents are sometimes shown supporting, protecting, and providing for the children.

The family status of most cases *does not represent the statistical facts*. Neither are *the new roles in the family adequately shown*. It is natural that students from single parent families or from families who have economic hardships or are dual career-families and attend the schools may feel unnatural in their family surroundings, alienated from this happy life depicted in all ways in the books and in teaching.

It is recommended school texts include the following: work of women, new roles in the family, separated and divorced families, unmarried families, poverty or particular economic hardship.

5.3. The Family in Secondary School Texts (i.e., gymnasium level)

5.3.1. General

In secondary school books (gymnasium level, ages 12-15) themes related to the traditional family also abound. Family bonds are emphasized and though it is the nuclear family which is presented, grandparents are also often included. The values of cooperation, affection, honesty, respect, and altruism are emphasized and conflict in the family is rarely presented. When conflict is presented it is usually between parents and adolescent children.

Books for Home Economics, Citizenship Education, and Careers Education introduce problems like economic hardship and violence in the family and seek to explore the expression of emotions by family members. These books also discuss various types of family. Single parent families as well as cases of children who miss both of their parents are often presented in literature books, however, those are almost always cases of parents who died.

5.3.2. Relationships and Roles in the Family: The Traditional Family

In many of the books, the value of the family as an institution is stressed; the members support one another and offer affection, safety, stability, acceptance and reassurance, especially the parents towards the children (e.g., *Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2005, p.45). The same values hold true in the case of single parent families, the text continues, so far as there is love (same reference).

Reference is also made in some passages to family warmth as a nursery for the developing child. Family life is depicted as the most important context for the education of the child--the first school of life--where the young person forms attitudes and values and develops cognitively (*Οικιακή Οικονομία* for the 3rd grade, Hadjiyassemi, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education, Cyprus Republic, 2002, p.27).

The family is also referred to as the social cell for the development and wellbeing of all its members, free from violence and neglect and with the protection and support of one another (Οικιακή Οικονομία for the 3rd grade, Hadjiyassemi, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education, Cyprus Republic, 2004, p.36). Values of love and affection are particularly stressed between mother and children (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2005, p. 22).

Mothers and fathers are presented as having distinctly different family roles in some of the readings. In one text, the father is presented as strict and authoritarian (never speaks, never laughs, never says to the children an affectionate word) while the mother is presented as patient, “a saint”, “she had the sweetness of the earth”. Similar references to the strict father and the affectionate mother can be found in Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2005, p.66. If the father has a “golden heart” and “iron hands” while the mother has patience and the children are serious and hard-working, then the family is ideal (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., as above, p. 138). The father, apart from being strict (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, p. 247), is also affectionate (e.g., Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, pp. 252-253), and advises his son on how to behave (Αρχαία Ελλάδα for the 2nd grade, p. 212).

The fairy tale of the girl with the matches brings up the need for parental care and provision as being rights for every child, as well as the values of love, cooperation, and affection. The value of honesty is also stressed: a family may be poor but must live with love and honesty (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for 1st year, Orphanides, N., as above, p. 138). Also stressed is the relationship with the grandmother, of whom the intervention the girl dreams about (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., as above, p. 101-109). Affection by the father is shown when he is holding his little daughter (“Ο Ιησούς Χριστός και ο Καινούργιος Κόσμος του Θεού» for the 2nd grade, p. 137”). Affection is also shown by Hector towards his son before returning to the battleground, in Homer’s Iliad (p.114). On p. 200, Hector worries about his son’s future while after the death of her husband, Hector’s wife mourns and is sad about her orphan boy.

Religious books refer to a relationship of trust which should exist between father and son (Προετοιμασία των Ανθρώπων για τον Καινούργιο Κόσμο του Θεού, p.16). The ten commandments are discussed, with reference to no. 5: “Honour your father and mother” (p. 64 of the same book). On p. 149 of the same book we find a proverb: “The wish of the parent for their child is a blessing for the child’s home” (Προετοιμασία των Ανθρώπων για τον Καινούργιο Κόσμο του Θεού for the 1st grade, p.149).

Emotions and particularly pain is described in separation, the need for protection is underlined, the family bonds are shown stronger during hardships and extreme conditions as may be the case during wars. Family bonds are shown in the framework of war (Second World War for Greece, Turkish Invasion for Cyprus). e.g., the mother and father worry about the fate of their son, and if he was to come back, then he would be brilliant offering to the community (Ανθολογία Κυπριακής Λογοτεχνίας, Phylactou, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education, Cyprus Republic, 1990, pp. 64-65). In another passage, the mother is sitting motionless, sad, and thoughtful in front of her dead son’s body which has been brought back from war (Ανθολογία Κυπριακής Λογοτεχνίας, Phylactou, A., as above, p. 79). In a religion book, the Virgin Mary’s relationship with Christ, her son, is described and her emotions are depicted when He was crucified (Workbook in Μάθημα Θρησκευτικών A and B, p. 41). Similarly, mothers are presented carrying provisions for their sons who are fighting against Italy during the Second World War (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 3rd grade, p. 267).

Parent-child bonds do not weaken when a parent dies: a son in the reading Η Μουσική Μέσα από την Ιστορία της for the 2nd grade, p. 19, takes an oath on his father’s grave that he will support the family and bring up the orphans. The pain of separation is described in the *History of Cyprus* book which describes a lot of separations as a result of the Turkish Invasion (Ιστορία της Κύπρου, Papastavrou, A. et al, Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 1995, p. 97) and scenes of mothers and fathers being killed in front of their own children or taken away or scenes of children taken away from their parents (same reference).

The passage of the girl with matches describes physical and psychological abuse of the girl by her step father. The mother does not seem to be alive and it is the grandmother who seems to have brought up the girl (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας, for the 1st

grade, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2005, p.143). In another passage, an orphan boy writes to his grandfather about the difficulties of his living as an apprentice in a foreign place (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., as above, p. 136) while a different passage describes a boy who was saved from a slave market where he was sold after the Turkish Invasion in the Island of Chios, after both of his parents were killed (Κείμενο Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, p. 210).

5.3.3. Grandparents

Apart from the usual support that grandparents may give to children, we also see them stepping in in cases of loss/death of one or more of their children. Grandparents willingly take the responsibilities of bringing up their grandchildren as in the case of a Bosnian family where grandchildren and grandparents are the only survivors of a killing (Προετοιμασία για τον Καινούργιο Κόσμο του Θεού, Nikas, A., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National education and Religions, Greece 2005, p. 95). The good relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is also shown in other passages. A music book, for instance, shows a nice relationship between grandfather and grandchild (Music book for the 1st grade, p. 19) with the grandfather willingly answering all the questions the child has.

5.3.4. The Family in History

In some of the books, the contemporary family is compared to families of other periods which are seen as qualitatively better. This comparison takes many different forms: For instance, the mother and father are shown as the educators of their children in ancient Athens (Αρχαία Ελλάδα for the 2nd year, p. 40); girls are shown as destined to have a family, become good housewives, and mothers (Αρχαία Ελλάδα for the 2nd grade, p.47-48) or they are trained to be good wives (same book p. 212); or the father trains his sons for hunting and punishes their misbehaviour (same book, p. 213). Similarly, men during the Roman and Byzantine times are shown undertaking the defense of women and children, women being occupied with domestic duties (Ιστορία Ρωμαϊκή και Βυζαντινή for the 2nd grade, p. 103). Family life is described in Roman and Byzantine times with men being occupied with fishing and women cultivating the fields (Ιστορία Ρωμαϊκή και Βυζαντινή for the 2nd grade p. 54).

Comparisons between the contemporary family and historical families are also offered in the religion books. For instance, women during Christ's time were treated as second rate citizens and children were under the absolute control of the father (Ιησούς Χριστός, ο Καινούργιος Κόσμος του Θεού και Εμείς religion for the 2nd grade, p.17). On p. 19 of the same book, a Hebrew family is described, where the father taught the law to his children and the basic customs of the ancestors while the mother taught prayers and hymns, and the community's morality. On p. 69 we see that a woman was not considered "clean" for 40 days after childbirth and needed to undergo a cleansing ceremony. On p. 133 we see that a woman's position was very low: she had to obey her husband and to be faithful, but she could not claim the same from him (e.g., she could not be a witness in court). A prayer said: "Thank God for not making me a woman" (Ιησούς Χριστός, ο Καινούργιος Κόσμος του Θεού και Εμείς for the 2nd grade, p. 133). Women took their children to the rabbi for blessing but the father also blessed the children before dinner (same reference).

Comparisons with ancient Greece are also numerous: Ancient Spartan law held that boys be separated from parents to train as future soldiers (Ιστορία, βιβλίο Εργασίας for the 1st grade, p. 58-59); the husband (builder-engineer) sacrifices his own wife in the foundation of the bridge he makes (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for 3rd year p.10); ancient Greek law condemns the wife's infidelity to her husband but does not condemn the husband's infidelity (Ιησούς Χριστός, ο Καινούργιος Κόσμος του Θεού και Εμείς for the 2nd grade, p. 133); children were called by their first names and the name of their father in the genitive (Ηροδότου Ιστορίες for the 2nd grade, p. 68-69).

In some passages, students are invited to compare families of the old times (differences, roles) with contemporary families (e.g., in Ιστορία, βιβλίο Εργασίας for the 3rd grade, Sepos, A., and Eliopoulos, P., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of education and Culture, Cyprus Republic, 2000, p. 9).

5.3.5. Modern Families

In some of the books, together with the image of the affectionate mother and the strict father, we also, sometimes, have the image of the affectionate father (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, p. 252-253).

Family relationships are shown in many passages. In the Technology Book the whole family is shown trying to cook in the open (Σχεδιασμός-Τεχνολογία for the 1st grade, p. 3). In the Home Economics book, the need of children for protection and provision is shown with the help of pictures (Οικιακή Οικονομία, Διατροφή και Υγεία, p. 2-17). The Home Economics book actually gives a lot of opportunities to children to discuss relationships in the family involving adolescence (e.g., how parents feel, how adolescents feel, the interest of the parents in their children, moments of conflict, seeing things from the perspective of the parents, etc. (Οικιακή Οικονομία for the 3rd grade, p.21-22). Poverty problems are described in a reading as parents and son are struggling to survive (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic 2005, p.131).

The Citizenship Education book for the 3rd grade refers to the family as the most important socializing agent, and discusses the changes of the institution since the old times. It refers to the neglect and abandonment of children by their parents. It also refers to the stereotypes and prejudices which are passed on to children by various institutions, among them the family (same book, p.59).

5.3.6. The Single Parent Family

It has become clear, so far, that the single parent family depicted in the reading books consists of one or both parents missing as a result of death or sometimes because of work abroad. Some more interesting examples include: the mother dies and leaves her husband with four children, then the father remarries in order to bring up the children (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., as above, p.211); the wives of sailors are waiting for them at the sea-shore, and a poem follows for the bereaved wives of sailors (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., as above, p. 219-220); a grandmother brings up her grandchildren who show love to her (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for 1st year, Orphanides, N., as above, p. 240); a daughter misses her father very much and feels his presence in spite of his being dead (Ανθολογία Κυπριακής Λογοτεχνίας, Phylactou, A., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus Republic 1990, p. 170); three single parent families are presented with the fathers away working as sailors

(Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 2nd grade, p. 11); the son has to support the single parent family because the father has died in the sea (Κείμενα νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 2nd grade, p.16); a grandmother brings up her orphaned grandchildren with the right values and ideals (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, Orphanides, N., Curriculum Development Service, Ministry of Education, Cyprus Republic 2005, p. 47); a grandmother rejoices for her grandchildren, whom she has brought up with hardships and sacrifices (In same reading, the grandchildren love their grandmother so much that they refuse their New Year's Day present in order to help with the treatment of their grandmother's eyes thus offering her happiness) (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 1st grade, p. 50). In yet another case the mother alone brings up her children by her self; she works many hours and she gives little time to her children, a rare case of problems presented in relation to single parent families apart from cases of loss (Κείμενα Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας for the 2nd grade, Veikou, C., Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religions, Greece, p. 32). Finally, in the Citizenship Education book for the 3rd grade, the family as an institution (Κοινωνική και Πολιτική Αγωγή for 3rd year, p. 19) is presented and all kinds of family are discussed, including single parent ones (Κοινωνική και Πολιτική Αγωγή, βιβλίο μαθητή 3rd year, p.25).

5.3.7. Summary

Secondary school books cover a lot of what constitutes the traditional family: the family roles and the importance of family bonds as well as issues related to support, protection, love, and the expression of emotions. Modern books ask students to discuss many types of roles and families but covering single parent families only in rare instances. In the reading books the only types of single parent families presented are those where the father is away or has died, or both parents have died. Substitute parents are usually grandparents, or more rarely, sons. Economic problems are alluded to, but are not described or explained. Separation of spouses is not presented at all in the books while new roles in the family are not even mentioned in the reading books. The modern books (e.g. Citizenship books, Home Economics books) leave more space for discussing changes in the institution of the family.

It is obvious that the picture given in secondary school books does not agree with the new facts of the Cypriot family, and that children belonging to separated, divorced, and

never married families, or children who belong to families having roles different from the traditional ones (e.g., working women, affectionate and helping fathers, etc) may feel out of this world, and more easily subjected to rejection from peers.

CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

The Ministry of Education and Culture does not implement any specific programs that address the children who come from single parent families. Similarly, the Ministry does not send any circulars to teachers on how to handle the needs of these children in specific. Schools and teachers work with children from single parent families not as a specific category of the student population but only in relation to the specific needs and problems of each individual child which might arise at some point in time.

This stance is reflected in teachers' understanding of the school's role in relation to children who come from single parent families. The teachers we talked to told us that in their experience schools do not handle children who come from single parent families differently than other children except for the fact that teachers might provide more psychological support and in some cases financial support to these children. For instance, some teachers mentioned that they tend to be more understanding of children who come from single parent families if they know that the children face particular problems at home. Similarly, some teachers said that they try to be more sensitive and careful with these children if they are aware of any problems they face. Yet, at the same time, teachers insisted that they do not single out any group of children at school for special treatment. In much the same way, a school counsellor reiterated this position by pointing out that all children are treated the same when it comes to disciplinary matters but for educational matters, teachers tend to be more flexible and lenient: "When a child has limited academic performance, [teachers] will help . . . when s/he is in danger of failing . . ."

In general schools do not have precise data about each child's family status and situation. Some schools, however, try to circumvent this limitation by collecting certain information from each child that can then be used to provide teachers and counsellors with useful information that they can use to support children who have specific needs. For instance, the principal of one secondary school gives at the beginning of the year a questionnaire to the students with questions that provide her and the teachers with useful information about the children and their lives (e.g., the questionnaire might include questions like: What do you like? How many brothers and sisters do you have? Where did you grow up? What classes do you find difficult? Etc, as well as questions related to personal and family issues). The school counsellor does the same thing with

children who attend the first year of secondary school. This allows both the teachers and the counsellor to approach the students who need extra help and to support them appropriately.

When a teacher suspects that a child has a particular problem (educational, emotional, psychological) that s/he cannot address, then they report it to the principal who, with the consent of the parents (both parents if possible even in the case of children who come from single parent families) contacts the Department of Educational Psychology of the Ministry of Education and Culture who then reviews the case and decides whether to send an educational psychologist to see the child. This process is rather long and bureaucratic and it is not uncommon from what teachers told us to take several months from the time of the initial request to the first visit of the educational psychologist to the school. This procedure is somewhat different for children at the first grade of primary school. Teachers are requested to allow 1st grade children a period of 2 to 3 months before they report a problem to the Department of Educational Psychology in order to make sure that the problem they have identified is not related to the child's adjustment to school life. Educational psychologists usually offer psychological support to children and provide counseling. They come in contact with the children and the teachers and make recommendations for how to handle particular problematic situations. If a child's family is under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare, then the principal might also conduct the Department and discuss the problem with the social worker who sees the family. On some occasions and when necessary, the Psychiatric Services might also be called upon to provide help and support to a child.

In secondary schools, school counsellors provide psychological support and counselling to children and in some cases to parents and intervene when necessary to help them deal with academic problems they face. That is, on some occasions counsellors inform the teacher about the family circumstances of a particular student and ask for the teacher's understanding and leniency with regards to the student's evaluation. When a school counsellor finds out that a child has lost one of his/her parents, then a meeting is arranged with the child so that the counsellor can provide emotional support. Similarly, when a child mentions something to a school counsellor which endangers the child's life, the counsellor is obligated by law to report it to the appropriate authorities such as the Department of Welfare Services or the Attorney General. However, if the child's life is not in danger, then his or her wishes must be respected by the counsellor and the

counsellor is expected to follow the child's wishes. School counsellors also refer children for further support to the Educational Psychology Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Schools do not have formal policies on how to support children who come from single parent families but when such children's needs correlate with financial needs, schools try to help the children in a variety of ways. In one secondary school, the principal told us that children sometimes from their own initiative collect money that they give to the principal to cover some of the school-related costs of other poor children. The help provided to the poor children is always done discretely by the principal. Another school principal noted that the very poor children in the school receive gifts during Christmas and Easter including a voucher for clothes from the Parents' Association. Though this is not a practice that happens in all schools but is rather at the discretion of the Parents' Association, it is customary in many schools for the Parents' Association to select a number of children (based on the recommendation of the teachers) who are in need of help and to offer them some help. On some occasions, this help may be in the form of a gift, in other cases it might be in the form of a free meal which again might be done with discretion (e.g., the child might be able to get a free snack and a drink every day from the cafeteria without paying). In our discussions with school administrators and teachers it became clear that no children are excluded from school events such as school trips, etc, for financial reasons and that the school staff contribute money to cover the costs of needy children. Another common practice mentioned to us, is for the school to charge each student some extra money in order to cover the costs of needy children.

Based on teachers' accounts, children from single parent families get support from a variety of people and services in relation to the school. Sometimes, children approach the teachers asking for help and support. Teachers try to be discrete when they discuss family issues with children from single parent families and in all cases, away from other children. Most teachers see their role as providing moral and psychological support to these children and in those cases where a child is economically deprived to join forces with other teachers and buy these children clothes and other necessities. Teachers also pointed out to us that needy children from single parent families get financial help from other sources like the Church and the Radiomathon (charity institution). Teachers also reported to us cases where children might take the initiative to support children from single parent families. For instance, one of the teachers referred to the case of a boy

from a two parent family who took it upon himself to help on a regular basis another boy who came from a single parent family and who needed help with his lessons.

The teachers we talked to had different kinds of advice about support for children from single parent families. Some teachers wanted to play a bigger role in supporting morally and psychologically children who come from single parent families but they felt that the school did not provide them with the time to do so. They therefore suggested that the Ministry could account for more time to fulfill this role. Similarly, some teachers recommended that teachers receive specialized training so that they can perform such a role since at the present they feel unqualified to do so; some in fact argued that the training that teachers receive should be specific targeting each school's particular populations and needs. Many teachers also complained about the slow response from the Department of Educational Psychology of the Ministry of Education and Culture when a request is made. Sometimes, the Department does not send an educational psychologist to the school for several months. Teachers recommended that this department should be better staffed or that each school could have its own educational psychologist.

Summary

The Ministry of Education and Culture does not implement any specific programs that address the needs of children from single parent families; similarly, schools do not receive any directives on how to handle the needs of these children. Children from single parent families are not treated by schools and teachers in a particular way that differs from the way other categories of children are treated. However, when teachers know about the particular problems and needs of such children they do try to help by providing the support that they can offer though, as many teachers explained, they feel that they lack the proper training to handle such cases. If the teachers identify a particular problem with a child who comes from a single parent family, they might refer the child to the Department of Educational Psychology for support or, in more serious cases, to the Psychiatric Services. The school might also contact the Department of Social Welfare Services for children whose families are under the supervision of this Department. Many teachers complained about the lack of adequate staffing of the Department of Educational Psychology and the long and bureaucratic process which is entailed in getting help for a child. For those children from single parent families who

face serious financial problems, many schools take the initiative to help them financially. Such help might come from teachers and children or from the Parents' Association of each school.

CHAPTER 7: FEEDBACK WORKSHOPS

On Saturday 16, December 2006, Cyprus College, the Center for the Study of Childhood and Adolescence and the Pancyprian Association of Single Parents and Friends organized a meeting aiming to present the preliminary findings of the research and to receive the participants' feedback on the findings for validation purposes. Participants in the event included single parents, children and adolescents from single parent families, primary and secondary school teachers, professionals working with single parent families, and other interested individuals. Partner representatives from Greece and the UK also attended the meeting. The findings were presented in three separate but parallel panels. One panel was aimed at single parents, teachers, professionals, and other adults. Children aged 7-12 and 12-16 composed the other two groups, respectively. In what follows, we trace each group's reactions and comments to the preliminary findings.

7.1. Feedback from Single Parents, Teachers, and Professionals

The discussion after the presentation of the key findings focused on a number of different issues. A question was posed to the panel on how the findings of the research will be utilized for the benefit of single parent families. As the researchers explained the submission of a report to the European Commission and the publication of a guide for teachers on how to work effectively with single parent children in schools are among the commitments of the participating countries to the project. The researchers also committed themselves to submitting the findings of the research to governmental departments whose work relates to single parenthood to put positive pressure on the State to adopt the research findings for policy making. Finally, the panel mentioned its commitment for the dissemination of the research findings through presentations to the media and public seminars.

A member of the audience then said that the research findings sounded vague to her because she could not come to a single conclusion about how single parent families experience their lives. In response, one of the researchers explained the purposes of qualitative research in contradistinction to quantitative research and the focus that such research takes, and proceeded to discuss the comparative perspective of the research approach.

Another participant asked if any comparative data around the issue of professional support between children from single and two parent families was available. As the researchers explained, the aims and objectives of the research did not actually include such a perspective but in any case it did not seem to appear in the data. The issue of professional support, as the researchers explained, was only addressed to children who come from single parent families. One of researchers also added that other children who come from different family arrangements probably have similar views on the issue with children who come from single parent families placing the issue in the wider frame of the local educational system and its weakness in helping children to express their feelings.

As a reaction to the question and the responses which followed, a single mother said that children do not really need any kind of professional support when the mother is able to support them. Reflecting on their experiences with the research subjects and drawing upon the research findings, the researchers clarified that not only children but many single mothers need professional support themselves after a loss, divorce or separation during the first transitional phase of their family's situation especially when members of the extended family of the single parent family are far away to provide such support.

Another question asked concerned the comparative results of all partner countries. In considering the presentation of the results in Britain, the panel suggested that the issues of poverty and social exclusion sometimes work in such a way that similarities as well as local differences are likely to appear. The researchers also made clear that the comparative analysis of the data will be done in the near future.

A single mother, member of the audience, pointing out the different types of single parent families suggested that the way that single parents and their children experience their everyday lives at home and in school differs. In describing her experience with the support services that she and her children receive from the Department of Social Welfare and in expressing her satisfaction about the services provided, she suggested that the support that children receive from professionals is crucial for their well-being and mothers or other individuals cannot provide such special support to children. She further suggested that there is a need in linking together the various support services

dealing with single parent families for an all-embracing support for children and parents who come from single parent families.

The panel agreed with all suggestions of this single mother but they also made clear that it is important to acknowledge not only the differences but the similarities that single parent families experience in their everyday lives.

Another participant suggested an initiative of all partners along with the Pancyprian Association of Single Parents and Friends that will pressure the government to consider the research suggestions in policy making. The researchers assured that every effort will be taken towards this direction but they also pointed out the objective difficulties. Taking the opportunity, a member of the Pancyprian Association of Single Parents and Friends suggested that it is time to promote the establishment of the Child Commissioner in Cyprus. The president of the Association assured everyone that they will work towards this purpose.

Finally, a participant reported that he found the findings of the research to be very interesting. He also said that he considers the Pancyprian Association of Single Parents and Friends the one which has to promote the interests of its members and to demand from the State and society at large to address their problems. He also agreed that teachers have to be educated in order to deal with the multiple problems that children from single parent families confront. The President of the Association and other female participants responded to him because they assumed that he said that children who come from single parent families are problematic children.

7.2. Feedback from Children

7.2.1. Introduction

Instead of presenting the research findings in a typical way, children in both groups have been asked to discuss certain statements related with the findings. The statements were as follow:

1. Some children from single parent families told us that they feel more independent in their relations with other children because their parents do not supervise them in the same way as other children from two parent families. How do you see this issue? Do you agree or disagree, and why?
2. Some children from single parent families told us that it is easier to get the things that they want from their parents because only one of the parents takes the decision. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
3. Some children from single parent families told us that the following are things that they do not like from living in a single parent family. Let us take them one by one; tell me if you agree or disagree and why.
 - Financial problems
 - Transportation problems
 - Time spend with the single parent
 - Loneliness
 - Security issues
 - Time spend with the absent parent
4. Some children from single parent families told us that one of their problems is that they live in small houses and often have to share their bedroom with their siblings. Do you face such a problem?
5. Some children from single parent families told us that their relations with children who come from two parent families are very good. A few other children, however, complained that other children make annoying comments about their families. Do you have any similar experiences?
6. Some children from single parent families told us that they get upset when others feel sorry about them. How do you feel about this?
7. Some children also suggested that bringing single parent families together aiming to discuss common interest issues is a good idea. How do you see such a suggestion?
8. Some children from single parent families said that they want more opportunities and better access to psychological support services. Do you share such a view?
9. Some children from single parent families told us that they prefer to talk to friends and relatives about their problems than to visit a professional for support. How do you see this issue?
10. Some children from single parent families told us that they worry about their future studies because they have financial problems. How do you feel about this issue?

7.2.2. Feedback from Children Aged 12-16

Some teenagers agreed to the statement that children who come from single parent families feel more independent and that they have more free space in doing the things that they want to do emphasizing however the differences of living with one rather than two of your parents.

Teenagers also confirmed that the financial issue is one of the most serious of the problems that concern children and parents who come from single parent families but they pointed out that some single parent families do not face any financial problems. Participating adolescents also reported that they do not face any transportation problems.

All participants in the group also agreed that the time that children from single parent families have with their parents is limited because usually single parents have many responsibilities. None of the participants reported that he or she feels any kind of loneliness. They reported that they have their friends, their parents and siblings, and their relatives to spend time with. Some of the participants, however, reported that they feel a kind of insecurity living with only one of their parents.

Many of the participants agreed with the statement that says that children who come from single parent families feel that something is missing from their lives while the rest said that this is not an issue for them. Many children also said that they would have preferred to live with both of their parents. Regarding housing, most of the children reported that they do not really have a problem with space in their houses and sharing of a bedroom with their siblings is not a problem for them.

Reacting to the statement about gossiping, two of the participants reported that they themselves witness negative comments about their families from other children and that they have fought with these children. The rest of the children said that they have never experienced such behaviors from others.

When we presented the suggestion of some people for regular meetings of children and parents from single parent families, some of the children disagreed and reported that they do not like to share their problems with others but some others found it to be a

good idea. Yet, some other children added that sharing your experiences with others is probably a good idea but family type should not be considered when you choose with whom to share your experiences.

Access to support services was the next statement that children commented on. The entire group rejected the idea not only of easier access to support services but they positioned themselves negatively in relation to getting any kind of professional support. They said that they do not feel comfortable to talk to strangers about their problems and that they prefer to talk to their friends and relatives about these problems. They openly said that they do not trust psychologists because they think that psychologists transfer their problems to others.

Finally, the participants agreed with the statement that the financial problems of a single parent family prevent children from fulfilling their future plans and studies. Some children said that despite the fact that they do not have plans for studies they will have problems if they decide to study.

7.2.3. Feedback from Children Aged 7-12

Many children who participated in this group also said that they feel more independent in a single parent family and that parental control is less than in a two parent family. Decisions, according to children, are taken easier in single parent families because disagreements between parents about several issues that concern the family do not really exist. Children also said that they get the things that they want easier from one or the other parent but they would have preferred to live with both of their parents. Some children also reported that they feel more secure living with only their mothers because their father in their previous family situation was not really useful in anything.

Some children also agreed that single parent families face many financial problems. Based on their experiences, they reported that they lack some things that they want or need to buy and that they get the things that they ask from their parents after long periods of time. Some other children, however, reported that they get whatever they want from their parents and on time.

Most of the children also said that they do not really have any problems with their transportation and that their grandparents always help with such tasks. Only minor problems related with transportation were mentioned by children.

Most of the children in the group reported that they spend enough time with their parents. A few children who spend less time with their parents reported that they do not really mind that and that they have a lot of things to do at home. Some children also said that they feel some kind of insecurity living only with their mothers and that it bothers them to live only with one parent.

Most of the children have seen the suggestion of the single parent family meetings positively. Some even suggested the organization of parties for children who come from single parent families. Finally, children have been asked to report the biggest problem that they face in their families. Most of them reported that their greatest problem is that they do not see their fathers often enough, some other children reported that their mothers are overprotective, and some others reported that their mothers get really tired at work, and that they do not have anyone to help them and as a consequence they often express their anger on them.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1. Introduction

The current report includes research findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with children from single parent families and two parent families, parents from single parent families and two parent families, and professionals who work with children from single parent families such as school administrators and teachers, psychologists and social workers. The major thematic areas analyzed include: family life; school life; financial issues; support networks; and social relations. The study also includes findings from an examination of school practices and procedures as well as an analysis of curriculum guides and textbooks used in primary and secondary schools. Finally, the report includes an outline of the methodological approach adopted, an overview of the relevant legislation and policy in Cyprus, and the results of the feedback sessions held with single parents, teachers, and other professionals as well as the children from single parent families.

8.2. Family Life

Key Findings

Children from single parent families say that they live a normal life and that they only face minor problems as is the case with all families. Besides school, children's activities involve taking private lessons, playing games, watching TV, going for walks and helping with housework. Children describe their relationships with their parents as good though both they and their parents would like to spend more time together.

Most children from single parent families say that there is nothing positive about living in a single parent family. However, some children identify positive aspects such as the fact that there might be no more fights between the parents, family ties may become stronger, or that they might receive more gifts or have double holidays. Some single mothers see an advantage to having a single parent family because of the increased freedom and independence that they now enjoy. Similarly, some single mothers express a sense of pride from being able to make it on their own and are happy because their children are no longer subject to physical or verbal violence.

On the other hand, children point out a number of negative aspects to living in a single parent family. Among these, the most important ones are the financial problems they

face, the difficulties involved in their transportation that the family usually faces, the sense of loneliness and the lack of security that they feel, and the absence of the father figure from the house and the limited time they spend with the absent parent. To address some of these problems, the children suggest, among others, an increase of the State's financial support to single parent families, the provision of psychological support to children and parents from properly trained professionals, and the provision of more communal facilities that they can utilize both for support purposes and for their leisure time.

Children from single parent families mention both happy and unhappy events in their lives as members of single parent families. On the positive side, they mention activities they engage in with their parents, vacations they take, gifts they receive, games they play, and important events in the family such as christenings or weddings. On the negative side, they mention events that disturb their family life such as a death, their parents' fights, illnesses, or the legal procedures of divorce.

On the whole, and with a few exceptions, single mothers do not think that parents of two parent families are prejudiced against their children. Nonetheless, many of them said that society in general does not fully accept single mothers and people make unfair assumptions about them and their children. For example, they say, society often assumes that children of single parent families are likely to be delinquent, to take drugs or to be involved in criminal activity all of which are stereotypes based on prejudices that people hold about single parent families.

Single mothers who reside in rural areas, more than any other category of single parents, complain about prejudice against them. As they explain, they get particularly upset listening to the different comments people make about them and their family status. They also mention their difficulties in making male friends, their parents' intrusions into their lives, losing their female friends who fear that the single mothers will steal their husbands, and the harassment they are subject to by older men.

Policy Recommendations

Policy making needs to mainstream issues related to single parent families and present this family type as one of many possible family arrangements. Policy discourses need to move away from describing single parent families as exceptional or abnormal which

often ends up stigmatizing the members of these families. Moreover, as the research has shown life in many single parent families continues in a normal fashion as in other kinds of family arrangements rather than in a dysfunctional manner as is often presented in public discourses. Policy makers need to promote new ways of addressing single parent families as families which are a possible outcome of the life course as well as families which contribute to society rather than being a burden.

The research study has shown that the extended family plays a key role in supporting the single parent family financially, psychologically, and in other ways. Moreover, as the study shows, for many children who spend a considerable amount of time with relatives there is a social understanding of the family which is much broader than the official definition which focuses on parents and children. Policy making needs to take into account the vital role played by the extended family in Cyprus, most notably through the role of grandparents, and expand its scope of eligible welfare recipients to include these key individuals who are very often directly and significantly implicated in child care for single parent families. This may be in the form of tax credits for these family members or more directly in the form of financial assistance. Given that grandparents are often retired and on a limited income, it is more imperative that their income is supplemented with financial support from the state which is after all relieved to some extent from providing public child care. Moreover, policies and programs should be aimed not simply at single parents but also at other members of the extended family that are implicated in child care and are often the primary child carers (e.g., training in childcare for grandparents, etc).

It is important for policy-makers to take into account the views of the members of single parent families which often contradict popular assumptions and misconceptions about the deterioration of family life following separation or divorce. As the research has shown, for some families the transition from a two parent to a single parent family is a welcomed change if that brings an end to violence or intense conflict in the family.

The process of separation and divorce is often a traumatic period for both parents and children. Policies which promote the institution of family mediation can go a long way in making the transition from a two parent family to a single parent family much smoother and psychologically more bearable for family members. The negative effects

on children from parental conflict can be ameliorated when parents receive mediation services and are able to resolve their differences peacefully.

Many single parents and their children who face poverty refer to not simply the financial aspect of poverty but also to the time aspect. Time poverty is a principal problem faced by many single parent families where the parents are struggling to provide for their families financially only to find out that they do not spend enough time with their children. Policy making therefore needs to address time poverty in ways which provide single parents with more opportunities to spend time with their children. Flexible and part-time employment should be provided as viable options for single parent families, however, the State needs to ensure that such jobs are not deprived of the full benefits of employment and of parity.

Accessible and affordable child care is a demand of many single parent families who find themselves trapped between the need to work and provide financially for their families and the demands of child care which is often either inaccessible or very expensive. To provide for accessible and affordable child care, the State needs to invest in child care facilities in local communities and subsidize the cost for single parent families in need.

Policies need to take into account the different types of single parent families (e.g., separated, divorced, widowed, unmarried, etc) so that they can more effectively target them with specific programs.

For many single parent families transportation is a major problem. Policies which allow for the subsidization of single parent families' transportation costs can relieve these families from the additional financial cost and potentially the time commitment often required by the single parent who needs to take his/her children around.

Like other socio-economically underprivileged segments of the population, single parent families should be provided with free or subsidized health care depending on need.

At the psychological level, one of the key concerns of many children from single parent families is the lack of time they spend with the absent parent, who in the majority of

cases happens to be the father. In designing policies that address children's needs for contact with both parents, programs which address parenting and parental responsibilities or mediation programs during the process of a divorce as well as general access to professional help and support can allow parents to play a more important role in their children's lives whether they live with their children or they don't.

8.3. School Life

Key Findings

Some differences between the single and two parent families exist with regards to the issue of children's transportation to school. The parents of two parent families do almost all the transportation of their children, while single parent families depend on the support of their close relatives in order to respond to their daily transportation needs. Nevertheless, the children of both groups do not have any problems with the transportation means they use.

Teachers do not identify any differences between children from single and two parent families. Even so, some teachers feel that children of single parent families tend to have lower performance levels either because they do not study enough or because they lack the proper concentration due to the problems they face at home. Most teachers feel that school texts contain very few references to issues related to single parent families and that they do not have the chance, as teachers, to discuss such issues in the classroom. Furthermore, some teachers stated that they avoid teaching material which refers to single parent families because they feel that they do not have the proper expertise to do it.

The factors that contribute to the problems faced by children from single parent families, as these are perceived by teachers, revolve around the single parent's character and the role he/she plays in supporting the children, the pressure that children may feel because of the financial problems that the family faces, and the psychological problems that children face as a result of their family situation.

Generally speaking, teachers do not have particular complaints about single parents, even though there are exceptions to this. Teachers also believe that children from two parent families treat children from single parent families well and do not distinguish them on the basis of their family status.

On the other hand, most single parents feel that their children do not receive the proper treatment at school and they believe that teachers should be more considerate and willing to help their children when they face learning difficulties. Similarly, parents of two parent families agree that, even though their children do not face particular difficulties, teachers should be closer to children and support them when necessary.

Single parents argued that the support that their children receive from school is not only unsatisfactory but very often insults and degrades their children. To support their arguments, single parents mentioned instances which left them unhappy about the way the school handled a particular issue in relation to their children. Children of single parent families, on the other hand, did not complain about any problematic issues they faced in relation to the school administration. Furthermore, the children of single parent families consider the support they receive from school to be satisfactory.

Children from both single and two parent families pay special attention to teachers' behaviour and feel that the good functioning of the school is closely related to the good behaviour of the teaching staff and the administration. The children of single parent families, in contrast to their parents, do not feel that they are being unfairly treated by their teachers because of their family status.

Policy Recommendations

Misunderstandings, lack of sensitivity, covert, and occasionally overt stigmatization, prejudice and discrimination at school occasionally give rise to a sense of social exclusion for poor children who come from single parent families. Though children, in general, do not find that other children treat them badly or unfairly because of their family status, the few cases that they experience are sometimes enough to create a sense of difference and exclusion. Educational policy makers should design programs which address the potential conflicts and misunderstandings which may arise in school among children or between teachers and children.

Teachers in the study were very clear about the lack of proper training in how to handle children who come from single parent families. Lacking a proper framework to explain the behavior and academic performance of children from single parent families, teachers sometimes make unwarranted assumptions about these children. Educational policies

need to integrate in the basic training of teachers as well as in the further training they receive once employed the subjects of family diversity, poverty, and social exclusion and their relationship to children's education.

Given that many children from single parent families who have received support from their teachers, both academic and emotional support, are very satisfied with the support they received it is recommended that educational policies devise programs that allow teachers to provide further academic support to children who face learning difficulties and who are emotionally vulnerable. To equip teachers to provide basic emotional support, proper training should be offered to them including training in ethics to ensure that they are sensitized to issues of privacy and confidentiality, issues which the children in our study identified as critical in their recommendations. Teaching hours reduction for teachers who can play this role is a good way to address this need.

Given the new social realities regarding family diversity it is critical that the curriculum adequately reflects these realities, providing teachers with opportunities to address family diversity in an educationally informed manner that takes into account both the local and international changes which are taking place. Curriculum guides and textbooks need to be revised with these changes in mind to reflect the contemporary social realities of Cypriot society. Similarly, other educational materials should be developed and made available to teachers to allow them to draw on in order to effectively address family diversity in the classroom.

Many of the children are highly suspicious of professional psychological help. One of their key concerns is that they will not receive real help for their problems and that they might end up being stigmatized. Policy making needs to devise educational programs which inform children about the benefits of getting professional psychological help when they need it and normalize it to the extent possible so that it becomes an acceptable option for children who need it. At the same time, educational policies need to take into account children's suggestions for providing psychological services which are easily accessible by children but at the same time are discrete so that children do not feel that they are stigmatized.

8.4. Financial Issues

Key Findings

Financial issues are among the most important problems faced by single parent families because they very often affect the functioning and wellbeing of the family. The transitional stage between one family status to the other (i.e., from a two parent family to a single parent family) has considerable economic and psychological costs for both parents and children and is a particularly difficult time for many families. Things are even more difficult when the family faces a housing problem because it has to move out from its current residence, pay rent, or take a housing loan. Another important problem faced by many families relates to the child support that the absent parent is legally obligated to provide. Many single mothers receive this maintenance fee from their former husbands with delays and sometimes not at all. This problem often leads some single mothers and their children to desperation, particularly if the family depends on this income for its day-to-day living. To be able to cope with the difficulties they face, many single parent families often find support in their immediate or their extended family environment—mainly parents and siblings—either directly by receiving money from them or indirectly by being offered lunches, gifts, help in transportation, etc.

Policy Recommendations

Given the widely used practice of sending children for extra lessons, many single parents feel that their children are at a disadvantage if they are unable to send them for extra lessons for financial reasons. Policies should include economically needy single parent families in the groups that benefit from subsidized fees when attending public educational institutes that provide extra lessons.

Many single parent families face serious problems with housing including the high costs for renting or buying a house or the inadequate space in the house. Policies which provide for housing subsidies based on need should be further supported while lower-rate housing loans should be made available to single parent families. One of the principal ways by which many children from single parent families experience inequalities is through their houses. Many children experience the lack of space in their homes as a major disadvantage in their upbringing. Policies need to take into account the housing needs of single parent families and provide such allowances which enable single parent families to live under proper housing circumstances.

Many children from single parent families feel uncertain about their educational futures because of the high costs of education. Policies need to take into account the financial difficulties experienced by many single parent families and offer the children from these families a more generous benefits package in line with the help provided to other family types such as the large families.

The financial difficulties faced by many single parent families may lead them below the poverty line with all associated consequences brought about by social exclusion. Policies should ensure a minimum income for all single parent families according to family size and provide these families with appropriate tax relief to supplement their income.

Programs which offer single parents opportunities for full or part-time employment should form the core of policy efforts to support single parent families. Policies, however, need to ensure the multiple demands placed upon single parents and the often resulting problem of time poverty are balanced with the benefits accruing from employment.

One of the most serious problems faced by divorced families involves the delays or unwillingness of the absent parent to provide the maintenance fee for supporting the children. As a result many single parents end up resorting to legal measures or simply giving up. A policy which guarantees the monthly maintenance fee to all single parent families by the state and which makes the state responsible for collecting the fee from the absent parents will address more effectively this problem which often makes many single parents desperate. Similarly, the State should take the responsibility of guaranteeing the continued support of the absent parent after a child becomes an adult (without the child needing to resort to legal measures) provided that he/she is still dependent on the single parent (e.g., soldiers, university students, etc).

Many children from single parent families become aware of their social exclusion when they are unable to participate in the activities of their friends and peers for financial reasons. Policies that provide needy children from single parent families with subsidized entertainment can be implemented to combat the social exclusion experienced by children.

8.5. Support

Key Findings

Most of the support that single parents receive is from their relatives. This support may be psychological (e.g., during hard times when children or parents face difficulties in dealing with certain situations), practical (e.g., taking children to school and other after-school activities, house maintenance, babysitting/childcare, etc), and financial (e.g., in the form of money or indirectly in the form of meals, food, etc). Grandparents as well as aunts and uncles play a vital role in supporting single parent families through the different stages they go. For those single parent families who have no relatives nearby or whose relatives may be elderly, things tend to be a lot more difficult.

At school, needy children, irrespective of their family status, receive financial aid usually from the school's Parents' Association. This may be in the form of coupons for buying clothes or shoes during holiday seasons or in the form of free meals. Educational psychologists also provide children with psychological support through counselling rather than therapy given that the Department of Educational Psychology of the Ministry of Education and Culture is understaffed. Similarly, school counsellors provide psychological support when necessary and help when there is a problem with children's school performance. School counsellors also contact the Department of Educational Psychology to examine children who they identify as needing further support.

Social workers also provide a range of services to single parent families such as counselling, information and prevention guidance, house visits and house care, care of children in public childcare facilities, and when necessary they refer children and parents to the Psychiatric Services for therapy. In our discussions with them, social workers explained that they face serious problems in performing their work duties because as a service they are understaffed while at the same time they are faced with more and more cases. Their suggestions for improving the situation include the hiring of more trained social workers, the implementation of prevention programs, the dissemination of information about the problems faced by single parent families to the public, the organization of seminars for parents, and the further collaboration and coordination between the various public services available.

Most children of single parent families state that they never received professional support (e.g., from counsellors, psychologists, social workers, etc) while a small number state that they talked to a professional only once. In general, children seem to be biased against professionals and question their ability to actually help them. On the other hand, children who have received support from professionals at some point express their gratitude towards these people for their services.

Some of the most important types of support that should be provided to single parent families and which both children and parents from single and two parent families suggest include among others: increase of financial support from the government; easy and free access to support services in times of need, the establishment of low-cost community centres for children, training of teachers on how to handle children from single parent families, lower fees for children's private lessons, lower rates for housing loans, flexible working hours for single parents, and free health care for their families.

Policy Recommendations

Though children are in general prejudiced against the use of professional psychological support, those who do use such help find it very useful and recommend easier access to such services and in ways that avoid their stigmatization. Moreover, children recommend the use of free or low-cost psychological support services. Policies should take into account the needs of local communities and provide such support services where children can have easy access to them. Policies should also take into account alternatives to the traditional psychological support and provide options for children to get support from those they are more likely to trust (e.g., develop peer support groups in schools or the local community).

The Educational Psychology Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture is severely understaffed and as a result there are long delays in service delivery. These services, given their critical role in addressing children's psychological needs, need to be properly staffed with properly trained professional psychologists who can respond quickly to the children's needs.

Single parenthood presents particular challenges for single parents who are faced with multiple demands. Policy makers should devise parental training seminars to help single parents and absent parents to undertake more effectively their new roles.

The support services provided to single parent families need to be staffed by highly qualified professionals who are trained in handling the particularities of single parent families. Policies should therefore incorporate training of professionals on issues of family diversity.

Support services need to be better coordinated to be more effective in addressing the needs of single parent families. Policies should facilitate the coordination of these services by providing mechanisms for better communication and exchange of information among the various services involved.

8.6. Social Relations

Key Findings

Based on our discussions with them, it seems that neither children from single parent families, nor children from two parent families choose their friends based on their family status. Children's interactions with their friends include: house visits, playing in the neighborhood, going out, discussions, etc. Some children from single parent families, however, said that they are more likely to share their problems and concerns with other children who have gone through similar experiences and are much more likely to understand them. Some of the rural children who come from single parent families stated that one of the problems they face is that of losing some of their friends who move to the cities with their families.

Children and parents from two parent families readily pointed out a number of problems that they associate with living in single parent families. On the one hand, some parents from two parent families said that they are unsure as to whether single parents raise their children properly because single parents are too busy to properly control their children's behavior and relations with other children something which puts these children at more risk for getting in trouble. On the other hand, other parents said that single parents bring up their children better than parents from two parent families because single parents tend to have more control over their children.

In general, and with a few exceptions, the relations of children from single parent families with their relatives tend to be good, especially with the family side of the single parent. Similarly, the children's relations with their neighbors range a great deal (from

no interaction at all, to a feeling of suspicion about the neighbor's role in gossiping about the single parent family, to a close and supportive relationship). Finally, children's relations with their friends are in general good though some of the children from single parent families reported cases of other children asking them inappropriate questions about their families or expressing a sense of pity towards them.

Policy Recommendations

Opportunities for affordable leisure activities are limited for children from single parent families especially for those residing in rural areas. Local governments need to invest in providing community-based resources for children. Policies that provide for safe spaces for children to play, interact with one another, and engage in leisure activities will further help the integration of poor children from single parent families who otherwise might experience social exclusion in relation to leisure and entertainment which is often costly.

8.7. School Texts

Key Findings

Generally speaking, primary school texts follow traditional lines, where families are, with only a few exceptions, two parent families. Books do not mention economic difficulties faced by families; when an economic problem arises in the family someone else takes over and addresses the problem (e.g., grandparents). Family bonds and the need for support and protection of the young are emphasized in some of the books. The family members' roles are mainly traditional with the father working, the mother caring for the children, and the grandparents providing additional support to the family. Single parent families, where they exist, concern the death of a father or a mother; there is rarely a reference to step-families and step-parenting. In some books, more modern family roles are presented in passages or as pictures. For instance, sometimes, both fathers and mothers are shown supporting, protecting, and providing for the children.

What is presented in primary school texts certainly does not represent the existing social realities about family types. Similarly, the books do not adequately show the new roles of family members as they are emerging in contemporary society. It is inevitable therefore, that children who come from single parent families, from families who have economic hardships, or dual career families may feel weird about their family situations

given this bias towards the so-called traditional model of the family which is still overwhelmingly presented in primary school textbooks.

Secondary school texts do not differ much from primary school texts. They also cover mostly what constitutes the traditional family: the traditional family roles with the father working and the mother at home taking care of the children and the importance of family bonds (e.g., issues related to support, protection, love, and the expression of emotions). Some of the more recently produced books ask students to discuss different family roles and family types but references to single parent families are still rare. In many of the books, the only types of single parent families presented are those where the father is away or one of the parents has died. Substitute parents are usually grandparents, or more rarely, sons. Economic problems are alluded to in some of the books but they are not described or explained. The separation of spouses is not presented at all in the books while new roles in the family are similarly absent entirely from the reading books. The modern books such as the Citizenship books and the Home Economics books provide more opportunities for discussing changes in the institution of the family.

Once again, as is the case of primary school books, secondary school books are not in line with the new types of family arrangements and family roles which are emerging in Cypriot society. Children who belong to separated, divorced, and unmarried families as well as children who belong to families having modern rather than traditional roles (e.g., working mothers, affectionate and helping fathers, etc) may feel that they are exceptional or abnormal rather than part of a range of family types and arrangements.

Policy Recommendations

Educational policy makers should make sure that school texts and readings include examples of contemporary families functioning in modern ways (e.g., mothers working, fathers helping with housework and being affectionate and sensitive, etc). Single parent families, apart from bereaved families, should also be presented in school texts reflecting the existing realities. This can help integrate children from single parent families better in schools.

8.8. School Practices and Procedures

Key Findings

The Ministry of Education and Culture does not implement any specific programs that address the needs of children from single parent families; similarly, schools do not receive any directives on how to handle the needs of these children. Children from single parent families are not treated by schools and teachers in a particular way that differs from the way other categories of children are treated. However, when teachers know about the particular problems and needs of such children they do try to help by providing the support that they can offer though, as many teachers explained, they feel that they lack the proper training to handle such cases. If the teachers identify a particular problem with a child who comes from a single parent family, they might refer the child to the Department of Educational Psychology for support or, in more serious cases, to the Psychiatric Services. The school might also contact the Department of Social Welfare Services for children whose families are under the supervision of this Department. Many teachers complained about the lack of adequate staffing of the Department of Educational Psychology and the long and bureaucratic process which is entailed in getting help for a child. For those children from single parent families who face serious financial problems, many schools take the initiative to help them financially. Such help might come from teachers and children or from the Parents' Association of each school.

Policy Recommendations

School procedures and practices should take into account the particularities of single parent families and be sensitive to their needs. Educational policies need to review all current practices and ensure that they conform to the realities faced by single parent families and not simply those of two parent families (e.g., school letters should be addressed to guardians and not to Mr or Mrs, etc).

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Appendix: Key demographics of single parent children

Table of Key demographics of single parent children

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	School Year	Place of Residence	Type of family
Manos	14	Cypriot	Boy	7	Nicosia Rural	Widowed
Chara	12	Cypriot	Girl	6	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Nino	11	Cypriot	Boy	6	Nicosia Rural	Separated
Nasos	13	Cypriot	Girl	7	Limassol Urban	Separated
Dina	12	Greek	Girl	6	Nicosia Urban	Widowed
Kiki	10	Cypriot	Girl	4	Nicosia Urban	Separated
Susana	7	Cypriot	Girl	2	Limassol Urban	Separated
Stalo	6	Cypriot	Girl	1	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Cyrus	14	British-Cypriot	Boy	9	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Pelagia	14	Cypriot	Girl	9	Nicosia Rural	Widowed
Tonia	14	Cypriot	Girl	8	Limassol Rural	Separated
Lina	10	Cypriot	Girl	4	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Koulla	13	Cypriot	Girl	7	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Andia	6	Cypriot	Girl	1	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Soulla	10	Cypriot	Girl	4	Limassol Rural	Separated
Gregory	7	Cypriot	Boy	1	Limassol Urban	Widowed
Tommy	14	Cypriot	Boy	9	Limassol Rural	Divorced
Takis	9	Cypriot	Boy	3	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Leo	15	Cypriot	Boy	9	Limassol Rural	Separated
Chrysanthos	11	Cypriot	Boy	4	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Anna	11	Cypriot	Girl	5	Nicosia Rural	Separated
Foulla	8	Cypriot	Girl	3	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Tevkros	8	Cypriot	Boy	2	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Doros	8	Cypriot	Boy	2		Father in prison
Ivoni	15	Cypriot	Girl	9	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Eudokia	13	Cypriot	Girl	7	Nicosia Urban	Unmarried mother
Stergios	13	Cypriot	Boy	8	Nicosia	Divorced

					Urban	
Thanos	10	Cypriot	Boy	4	Nicosia Urban	Widowed
Themis	11	Cypriot	Boy	5	Limassol Urban	Unmarried mother
Athos	14	Cypriot	Boy	8	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Phanos	7	Cypriot	Boy	1	Limassol Urban	Unmarried mother
Argyris	12	Cypriot	Boy	6	Nicosia Rural	Widowed
Vasos	13	Cypriot	Boy	7	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Lenia	14	British-Cypriot	Girl	8		Father in prison
Litsa	15	Cypriot	Girl	9	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Lenas	15	Cypriot	Boy	7	Nicosia Urban	Unmarried mother
Myrto	12	Cypriot	Girl	6	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Olga	12	Cypriot	Girl	6	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Yiakgos	10	Cypriot	Boy	5	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Sonia	11	Cypriot	Girl	5	Nicosia Rural	Separated
Savvas	15	Cypriot	Boy	8	Nicosia Rural	Separated
Sotos	15	Cypriot	Boy	9	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Mike	16	Cypriot	Boy	10	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Vergos	15	Cypriot	Boy	9	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Sylvia	14	Cypriot	Girl	8	Nicosia Urban	Divorced
Nontas	7	Cypriot	Boy	2	Nicosia Rural	Separated
Koulis	10	Cypriot	Boy	4	Nicosia Rural	Separated
Vefa	8	Cypriot	Girl	2	Limassol Rural	Divorced
Thomis	10	Cypriot	Girl	4	Limassol Rural	Divorced
Anais	10	Cypriot	Girl	4	Limassol Rural	Divorced
Pieros	9	Cypriot	Boy	3	Limassol Rural	Divorced
Mika	13	Cypriot	Girl	7	Limassol Rural	Widowed
Antonia	13	Cypriot	Girl	7	Limassol Urban	Unmarried mother
Sophia	16	Cypriot	Girl	10	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Sepos	15	Cypriot	Boy	9	Limassol Urban	Divorced
Pambis	14	Cypriot	Boy	8	Limassol Urban	Unmarried mother

England National Report

By Taylor, F., Cohen, S., Crawford, K., Giullari, S., Walker, J.

Chapter 1: Executive Summary of Policy Recommendations

1.1. Supporting the role of the family

- Family policies are based on the perception that family life revolves around only mother and father as an economic and parental institution, with the emphasis on marriage. Single parent children have a more sophisticated understanding of family as being more about social than biological relationships, locating economic and care support in a broader framework of extended family and family friends. Family policy-making therefore needs to consider the role of the extended family, the fluidity and dynamic of family life, and that children are likely to experience a variety of family arrangements.
- From a child's perspective, single parenthood can lead to a better quality of family life with significant advantages, especially less arguments and freedom from violence. Policy discourse should acknowledge this fact and stop treating the single parent family as a social problem or social threat.

1.2. Supporting the care of children

- The child adult separated policy model, as discussed within the policy review section later in this document, underpins the government's focus on reducing 'joblessness' amongst single parents and fails to acknowledge the interplay between financial and time poverty, affecting single parents and their children.
- Childcare provision for many single parent families remains inadequate and unaffordable. The consequence is that single parents often have to 'juggle' employment and childcare responsibilities single-handedly, with their children being forced to help maintain the effective running of the home through housework, childcare of younger siblings and emotional support for their parent. Older children's efforts to support their families can negatively affect their school work and attendance, and contribute to their social exclusion from play and leisure activities with friends.
- Consequently, integrated policies are required which help to relieve pressures on the single parent and so reduce pressures on their children. In particular, childcare needs

to be more accessible, affordable and reach a broader age group. Tax credits for formal childcare should be extended to informal childcare provided by the extended family.

- Children also reveal they want childcare embedded in a relationship of love and intimacy which can never be fully substituted by formal childcare.

1.3. Time poverty

- Single parent time poverty is a significant factor in children's lives. From the child's viewpoint it is vitally important to spend quality time with their single parent if the relationship with that parent is to be properly sustained and for them to benefit from it. However, government policies to lessen 'joblessness' amongst single parents, underpinned by the child parent separated model, fail to take account of the importance children and parents place on 'time to care'.
- Many children, especially older children whose single parent works or studies, complain of lack of quality family time together. They end up spending more time with and under the influence of their friends, than they do with their parent. The consequential weakened single parent-child relationship can also have serious emotional repercussions making children feel neglected, angry and frustrated and in need of a talking outlet to relieve their emotional burdens. Single parents are acutely aware of these problems and argue for more flexible, child-friendly employment hours, better quality part-time employment and more accessible and affordable childcare. Adult employment policies should take this into account and the England should adhere to the European Union's adult employment time directive policy.
- If the government's proposal to force single parents with children over 12 onto Job Seekers Allowance goes through, the problems of long working hours together with the gap in childcare and leisure provision for children of secondary school age need to be seriously addressed.

1.4. Addressing stigma

- Policy needs to acknowledge that the prevalence of single parent families, particularly in an urban context, has resulted in an explicit discourse of normality with the majority of single parent children not experiencing stigma. They do not perceive their family situation to be unusual or a cause for interest or response amongst other children. Politicians that use discriminatory discourse for popular effect as a grounding for policy-making, do not reflect children's opinion, or popular opinion of single parent family life.
- Overt criticism of single parent families is now predominantly confined to areas with few such families, notably small and isolated rural communities. A family diversity discourse in which single parenthood is conceived as a normal stage of the life cycle, and there is respect for the contribution that single parents bring to society in providing and caring for their children single-handedly in order to lessen their children's greater risk of poverty, could go a long way to reduce stigmatisation in a rural context.

1.5. Income poverty

- Many older single parent children experience the stigma of poverty rather than the stigma of coming from a single parent family. They are cognisant of 'being poor' and perceive themselves as worse off financially than children who live with two parents. They face the constant worry they will not be able to afford to go out with friends and are aware they enjoy less family days out, less regular family holidays and less pocket money than their peers.
- Mothers in poverty will take responsibility to make ends meet which can in some cases, impact detrimentally on their physical and mental health and in turn affect family well-being.
- Single parents' caring responsibilities, inflexible working conditions and lack of skills and training support are all central causes for the poverty experienced by children. More holistic measures are needed dove-tailing together across government departments to address single parent and thereby child poverty, including a gender impact analysis of government funded training initiatives;

extension of the right to request part-time work to cover parents with older children; single parents being enabled to work more hours per week before benefit is withdrawn; and, clearer information on tax credits.

- Our research findings underline the validity of addressing child poverty from children's perspectives and linking this with single parent poverty. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should underpin all policy-making on child poverty.

1.6. Social inclusion

- The 'social investment' strategy sees a child as 'child worker of the future' not 'child citizen'. When discussed in a policy context, social exclusion is defined in adult terms as mostly an issue of economic exclusion. However, children perceive social exclusion as having a relational element. It is exclusion from friendship that matters most to them, and their stories highlight how poverty has a significant negative impact on their capacity to make and sustain friendships, which has serious implications for their social mobility in later life.
- Comparatively poor home environments can add to children's sense of social exclusion. They complain about shared bedrooms, a lack of space at home to play or that peers have greater living space. Housing policies should be reviewed with these findings in mind, given the increasing gap in facilities between home owners and those in social housing/private rented accommodation. Strong recommendations also come from children for investment in leisure activities, youth clubs, swimming pools etc. and for cheap accessible transport to get there, particularly in rural areas.

1.7. Community support

- Some children from single parent families worry about their parents' social isolation and recommend more community support groups where family members can socialise and make new friendships which in turn can relieve pressure on children. More investment is needed in family peer-support groups, helping to develop community solutions with regard to emotional and social support, rather than the increasing child adult separated policy model.

1.8. Education

- Continuing educational focus is needed on emotional literacy and support. Support services including special learning units, learning mentors, tutor groups and counselling services which children feel help and support them in talking about and overcoming their worries, need to be further extended in schools.
- In general, single parent children are very positive about school, especially younger children. However, there are many examples of poverty associated disadvantage experienced in and outside school by secondary school children, likely to negatively impact on their school performance as well as their post-school life expectations. Yet some teachers, as well as educational support professionals, fail to appreciate the links between family poverty and the school experiences of single parent children. Instead they can hold some stigmatising notions that when single parent children do exhibit difficulties with achievement or behaviour, it is predominantly because of negative factors associated with the child having only one parent.
- Greater awareness is needed amongst teaching and educational professionals about: the potential for discrimination in schools because of poverty and low expectations; the diversity of single parent families; the role of the extended family and friends; the impact of single parent's time poverty; and, avoidance of institutional discrimination. These issues should be acknowledged in educational material, with training for teachers to gain insight into single parent children's lives, and a teachers' guide to family diversity.

Chapter 2: Introduction

Research Project Background

Despite rising numbers of single parent families throughout the EU, and the increased likelihood that these families will live in poverty and experience many different forms of social exclusion, we know little, if anything, about how children living in single parent families experience and perceive their lives as members of these families. Much of the existing research carried out on single parent families has focused on the problems and challenges they face, but the voices of the children that belong to these families have largely remained silent. Whilst the perspectives of adults such as parents, teachers and other professionals are definitely important in understanding the life situations of single parent families, it is crucial to include children's perspectives in order to really understand how social exclusion and poverty impact on these families. Providing a voice for children in single parent families would enable better informed policy-making, allowing development of policies that integrated children's needs and perspectives, rather than exclusively from the vantage point of adults in decision-making arenas. Consequently, it was felt that research efforts should be directed more towards incorporating children's own understandings and points of view in relation to single parent families. Therefore, a child-centred research approach was proposed as a necessary tool to build and extend the knowledge-base on this issue, and to guide development of appropriate policies for combating the poverty and social exclusion experienced by single parent families.

More specifically the objectives of the research project were to:

- Explore how children of single parent families experience and understand their daily lives
- Investigate to what extent and how children of single parent families experience, understand, and cope with poverty and the various forms of social exclusion they might face including stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion from certain kinds of social relations and contexts
- Determine how children and single parent families perceive the current support and services available to them as they relate to family (immediate and extended), peers, school, community, health and social services

- Elicit what resources children from single parent families draw on for support and what kinds of support (formal and informal) they wish they had
- Explore how education, in interaction with community, health and social services, facilitates the inclusion or exclusion of children who come from single parent families through their procedures and practices
- Investigate how other groups in society who come into direct contact with children from single parent families (peers and their parents who belong to two-parent families, teachers and other school-related professionals) view them and their families
- Review how the notion of family is treated in school curricula, and textbooks in particular
- Investigate the procedures and practices followed by schools in relation to single parents and their children

It was proposed that the research be cross-national and comparative in nature, describing through comparison both similarities and differences between the participating countries: Cyprus, England and Greece. The research was undertaken by SPAN in the South-West of England and by Lincoln University in the North East. The findings of the research study were to be diffused transnationally, as well as informing policy-making at the national level in different areas of interest including employment, education, health and social welfare. It was also anticipated that the research findings would be useful, at the local and national level, to a range of professionals working with children from single parent families such as teachers, social workers, psychologists, school counsellors and health professionals, to help improve the services and programmes they provide to them.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Research Structure

In order to meet the research study objectives a cross-national comparative qualitative research design and methods was used. It was felt that qualitative research would best achieve a full understanding of children's, parents', teachers' and professionals' views, attitudes and motivations. Face-to-face interviews were considered the most appropriate qualitative research method given the sensitivities of the research subjects, using a combination of individual interviews and focus groups. The type of questioning adopted for all interviews was semi-structured, designed to achieve the research objectives within the context of a fairly flexible discussion format. The use of semi-structured interviews also allowed the generation of comparable data. Detailed discussion guides were followed to focus the discussion, but open-ended questions were also used. These allowed research participants to express their thoughts and feelings, and to describe their views, attitudes and ideas, in their own terms and vocabulary. Time was left at the end of each interview or group discussion to ask whether participants had anything else they wished to comment on that had not been covered or to suggest any other issues they considered important that had not already been mentioned.

In addition, qualitative content analysis was used to review textbooks used in schools to identify how the notion of family is treated. On-site visits and observation were also used, in combination with interviews, to investigate the procedures and practices followed by schools in relation to single parents and their children.

3.2. Sampling

The research sample included children from single parent and two-parent families, aged 6 to 16 years, balanced in terms of age, gender, class, ethnicity and geographical location (including urban and rural). The sample of children from single parent families included all major subcategories of this group, namely, children from divorced, separated, unmarried and widowed families. It was intended that the research sample focus on parents and children who are socially excluded and living in poverty. Therefore, although respondents were not specifically recruited by social class or any socio-economic criteria such as 'free school meals', the aim was to concentrate recruitment in local authorities with relatively high levels of social deprivation.

In relation to geographic location, the primary school sample was recruited from two areas of North East Lincolnshire. The urban area was selected because of the identified level of social deprivation and poverty, and the rural area because of its associations with the same local authority. For recruiting the secondary school sample, Bristol was selected as the urban research centre because of the links SPAN already had with the local single parent family community; and Cornwall was chosen as the rural research location since many of its rural local authorities have some of the highest levels of social deprivation in England.

The total number of interviews and focus groups conducted in England by research sample category are shown below. The research sample is also represented diagrammatically on the next page.

- Children of single parent families (40 in-depth interviews and 4 focus groups)
- Single parents (4 focus groups)
- Children of two-parent families (4 focus groups)
- Parents of two-parent families (4 focus groups)
- Teachers and other school-related professionals e.g. psychologists, social workers, school councillors (focus groups individual interviews)

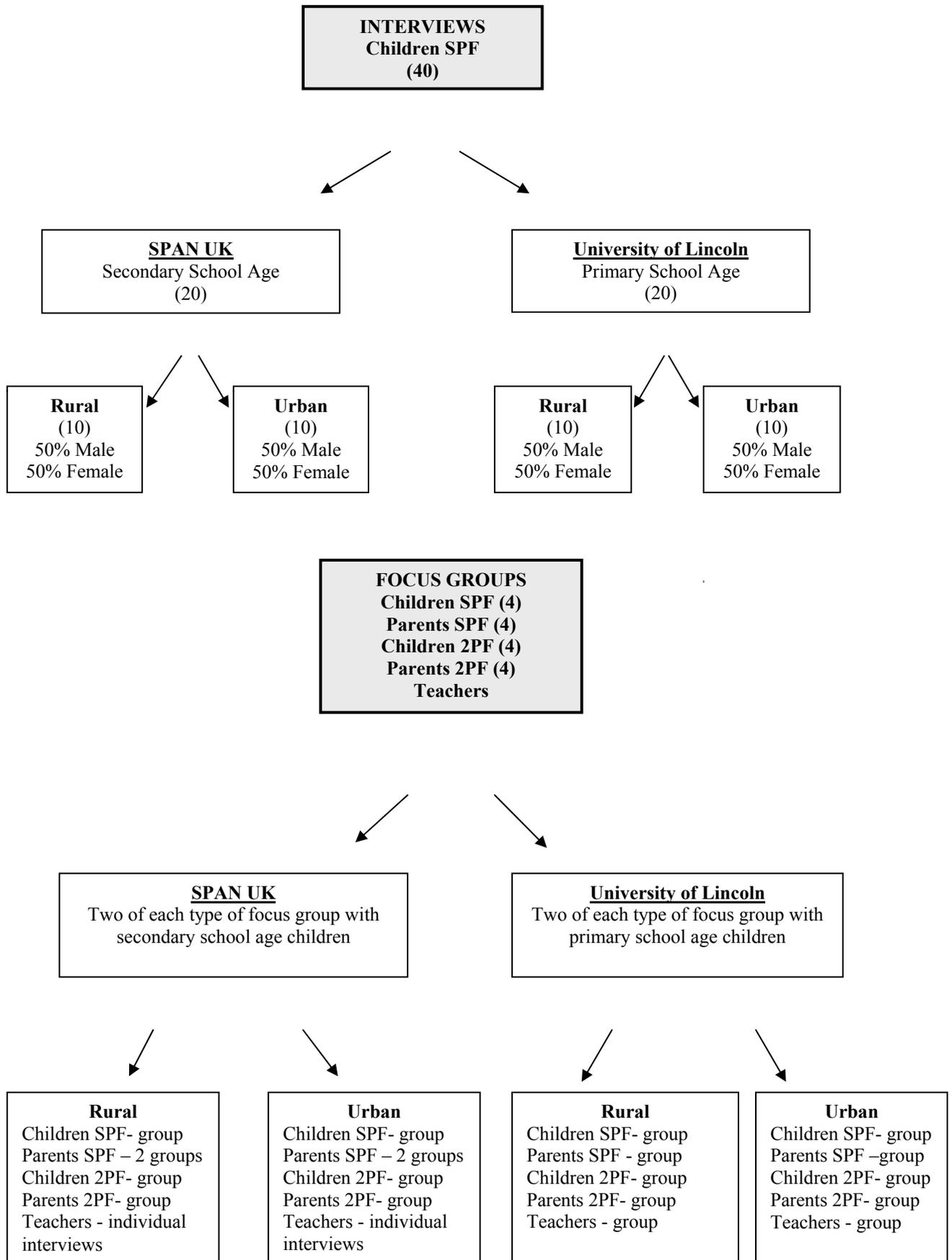
3.3. Access Issues

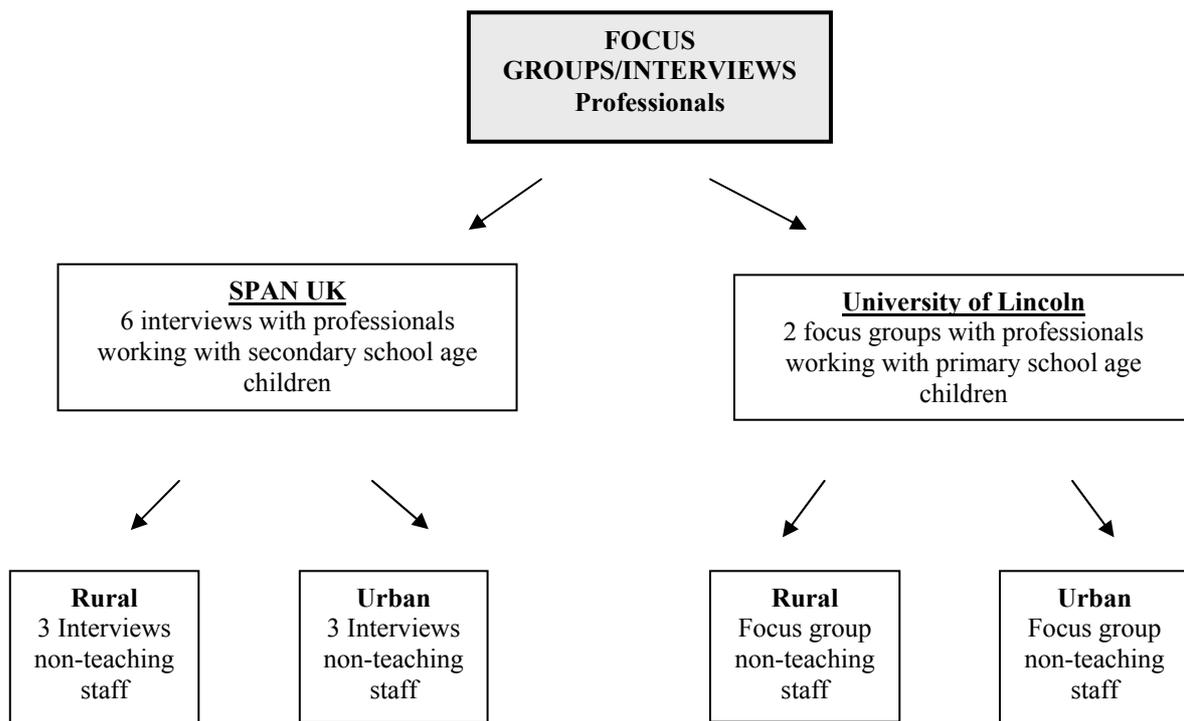
In the North East, contact to establish access to undertake the research with younger children was made through schools in one local authority, NE Lincolnshire. It was felt that schools would allow the most direct contact with a representative sample of children and parents in the area. The schools subsequently recruited were supportive in sending a letter from the researchers to all parents outlining the research and inviting the parent(s) and their children to take part; this subsequently generated the sample of younger children for the research.

The positive and helpful support from these schools presented a number of opportunities in working with the younger children; although children's social worlds span many different settings, home and school are two of the most important. Additionally this allowed potential access to a large sample of children and to their

parents, which was given legitimacy by the support of the school and the staff. All the schools were supportive in providing access to suitable places to interview children, especially access to the children during the day when they may be more receptive.

UK RESEARCH SAMPLE STRUCTURE





Initial contacts in Bristol and Cornwall with single parents and single parent children were made through single parent associations (SPAN and Cornwall One Parent Support). This approach led to recruitment of less than 40% of the total number of parents and children required. A wide range of other voluntary, community and statutory organisations were approached to help with recruitment of single parents and single parent children as well as professionals. The organisations who actively assisted with recruitment of respondents were, in Bristol - Hartcliffe Club for Young People; Connexions, Bristol and Avon Chinese Women's Group; and Masti Youth Group, Easton. And in Cornwall - Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change (CN4C); School's Multi-Agency Resource Team (SMART), Camborne; Crossover Community Project, Camborne; Connexions, Newquay; Anchor Project, Mental Health Resource Centre, Falmouth.

Several of the organisations approached expressed surprise that a research study was focusing on the lives of single parent families. They felt that single parent families might be thought a relevant subject for research ten to fifteen years ago, they now perceived such families as 'normal' and therefore not of special interest. Therefore, to

encourage recruitment it was found more beneficial to link the research study to current child poverty policy discourse, highlighting the social exclusion and poverty focus of the research and the greater risk of poverty faced by children in single parent families.

It proved particularly difficult to recruit secondary school age boys to participate in the research. This may well be because girls are more prepared to talk about their feelings on home, school and life in general. Given that relatively few boys were willing to be research respondents when approached via single parent association contacts, it was necessary to recruit boys through direct contact with youth clubs and youth centres where teenage boys were thought likely to socialise.

3.4. School Recruitment

Initially a letter was sent to all primary and junior schools in the urban area of NE Lincolnshire and three schools responded positively. Additionally a rural school was approached and they willingly agreed to participate. All the schools expressed an interest in learning more about the needs of their children, parents and the community of which they are a part. Whilst the schools recognised that there may be issues for children living in single parent households, staff highlighted the individual and unique needs of all children in relation to social exclusion and poverty.

All the schools in the North East area of this study occupied old, traditional buildings. The urban schools from which the samples were drawn were in an area of recognised disadvantage, centrally placed within the community, within streets of each other. The rural school was not. The rural school was a church school, situated in a small rural village, next to the church. Of the four schools who took part in the research one was an infant school for children aged 3-7 years, two junior schools for children aged 7-11 years, and one (the rural school) a combined infants and junior school. All of the schools were community, co-educational day schools.

The Children & Young People's Services departments of Bristol City Council and Cornwall County Council, responsible for local education services, were initially contacted to assist in the recruitment of secondary schools to participate in the research study. After discussion about the research objectives, Cornwall Children's & Young People's Services felt there were three schools which might be relevant to the study and

directly e-mailed them with the project details. One of those schools responded positively, affirming their interest in becoming involved in the study.

Bristol Children's & Young People's Services declared they were unwilling to help recruit a secondary school to participate in the research project being antipathetic to any focus on single parent children in education. They emphasised their working principle of treating each child as an individual, irrespective of family background. It was then decided to write to the head teacher of every Bristol state secondary school with information about the research study and to ask if they were interested in being involved with the research. There was no positive response. Therefore one of the Bristol secondary schools was approached directly through a personal contact of SPAN's, and agreed to participate in the research project.

The school in Cornwall is a comprehensive secondary school for children aged 11-16 years. Its main catchment area is a local authority ward on the Lizard Peninsula, SW Cornwall. The Bristol school is a community school offering free education to secondary school pupils aged 11-18 years. The main local authority wards served by the school are Lawrence Hill, Easton and Ashley which the most recent 2001 Census shows have some of the highest proportions of single parent families in the City.

All the schools involved in the research, through their governing bodies, are accountable to their constituent communities for their achievement. At the same time, apart from the Bristol school, they are supported and accountable to their Council (the Local Education Authority [LEA]), which, as elected bodies are accountable to the whole community.

3.5. Ethical Issues

Particular attention was given to ensuring that 'informed consent' was obtained from each respondent, including children. Prior to potential respondents agreeing to participate in the research study, they (or their parent) were sent a leaflet explaining background details to the research study. Information was provided on the organisations conducting the research, the key reasons why the research project was being undertaken and how the research findings would be used. The leaflet emphasised that all contributions to the research would be anonymous and confidential. It was also

explained that the research discussions would be tape-recorded, but that only the research moderator would listen to the recordings. Once a child had given their initial agreement to participate, their parent was asked to read and sign a consent form. The consent form repeated details provided in the information leaflet. It also explained that the child's identity would be protected and not used in any research publication, and that if a child were to divulge any information during the interview suggesting they were at risk of harm, it might be necessary, with the child's agreement, to share that information with others who could help the child.

Where parents wanted to sit in and observe the interview, they were asked to sit where possible, behind the child being interviewed, so that the research moderator alone could have direct eye contact with the respondent. This ensured that the child realised that they were the focus of the interview not their parent, and it also restricted the child from observing and hence being influenced in their responses, by seeing the reactions of their parent. Since most of the interviews with primary school children were conducted within school and in school time hence providing reassurance for parents, none of the parents chose to observe the interview. By contrast, many parents of secondary school children wished to be present during the interview, most likely a consequence of the majority of these interviews being conducted in the family home.

Prior to the start of each interview and focus group, the research moderator again explained details of the research methodology to respondents, underlining the anonymity and confidentiality of the process. In addition a 'storyboard' was used for primary school children to support them in understanding the purpose and process of the interview and to gain their individual consent. Time was left at the end of the research discussion, after the tape recorder had been switched off, to ask respondents whether they had any additional questions about the research and how the findings would be used. Respondents were also asked if there was anything troubling them about what had been discussed during the research that they would like to talk further about. Single parents who had observed their child being interviewed were also asked these same questions.

3.6. Policy Review

3.6.1. Single Parent Families in England

Socio-demographic profile

In spring 2005 nearly one in four of dependent children lived in a single parent family in Great Britain. Their numbers have been growing since the 1970's but the fastest growth has been in the last two decades (ONS, 2004). In 1972, 7% of all dependent children lived in a single parent family, compared to 24% in 2005 (ONS, 2006). The number of people living in single parent households is expected to rise almost five-fold by 2026 (Ermisch and Murphy, 2006). Still single parenthood is quite dynamic and as such is best conceived as a stage in the life cycle lasting on average 5.5 years (Millar and Ridge, 2001; Marsh et al, 2001).

The families and children study (FACS) is a representative annual survey of British families with dependent children that has been running since 1999. The most recent sweep was undertaken in 2004 (Lyon et al, 2006), and it shows that children living in single parent families are far more likely to be an only child and to be living with a younger mother (under 30) than those children who live in a couple family. The median age for a single parent is 35. Single parent fathers tend to be older, the largest proportion being in their 40s, whilst the majority of single parent mothers are in their 30s, despite the fact that the UK has one of the highest rates of teenage conceptions in the world, and the highest in Europe, only 3% of single parents are teenagers (OPF, 2005).

In 2005, 9 out of 10 single parent families were headed by a single parent mother (ONS, 2006). In 2004, 2% of dependent children lived with a single parent father, 22% with a single parent mother, and 76% with a couple (Ermisch and Murphy, 2006). Children living with a single parent father tend to be older. In 2004, 53% of single parent fathers had children aged 11-15, and 16% had children under 5, compared to 35% of single parent mothers, and 48% of single parent mothers, in receipt of social assistance (OPF, 2005).

Children live in diverse single parent families in terms of their parent marital status. In 2004, the majority of single parents were ex-married (51%), 45% were single-never married, and 4% widows. Amongst the single category the majority are likely to be ex-

cohabiters. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of births outside marriage and in cohabitating unions. In 2003, 25% of live births in England and Wales were in cohabitating unions. Cohabitating unions have a high and increasing dissolution rate, and amongst those living in cohabitating union, mothers are less likely to marry than childless women (Ermisch, 2006). It is these trends rather than divorce that account for the dramatic increase in single parenthood, which is now the fastest growing group (Kiernan et al, 1998). There is also an important gender distinction with 68% of single parent fathers being ex-married compared to 49% of single parent mothers.

Most single families live independently. Since the 1970s there has been a decline in the number of single parent mothers that lived with kin, from 18% in 1973, to 9% in 1993. What is more striking is the fact that in 1973 almost half of never-married mothers lived with kin, compared to 16% in 1993 (Kiernan et al, 1998). Still relatives remain an important source of temporary accommodation, economic support, and childcare. However the individualist nature of kin ties in England means that single parent mothers tend to mostly borrow money, receive small in-kind support, and if they receive regular childcare they tend to pay for it in cash or at least reciprocate in kind (Giullari, 2002). Interestingly single parent mothers are more likely to live with relatives if they are in low-paid work (Millar and Gardiner, 2004).

Poverty and social exclusion in single parent families in England

According to the FACS, in 2004 children in single parent families were more likely than children living in a two parent family to: be in the lowest income quintile group (43% compared to 6%); live in social housing (51% to 15%); more likely to have their health described as 'not good' and/or have a longstanding illness/disability (20% to 14%) (Lyon et al, 2006). This is not surprising, as although the risk of living in poverty in a single parent family has fallen from 58% in 1999 to 47% in 2003, 48% of children living in a single parent family are poor compared to 21% of those living in a two parent family (OPF, 2005). Single parent families and those on health related benefit are more at risk of long duration of poverty, which is particularly damaging (Millar and Ridge, 2001). This is partly an issue of household structure, as escaping poverty increasingly requires more than one income, but it is also because single parents score quite highly on the key predictors of child poverty in the UK, which are: working status, household structure, ethnicity, ill health and disability, housing tenure.

Single parents are almost four times more likely than couples to live in social housing or privately rented accommodation. In general regardless of the family type, those living in jobless households, were the most likely to report housing in 'fairly poor state', and generally were more disadvantaged in terms of housing (Lyons et al, 2006; Barnes et al, 2004). Indeed the parent working status is the biggest predictor; a child living in a household where no one works has a three in four chances to be poor (Hirsh, 2006). As previously argued in comparative terms the higher risk of child poverty in the UK is linked to the high numbers of children living with a single parent not in employment. The employment rate of single parents fell dramatically below 40% in the early 1980s, and has since increased to 56.6% in 2006 (DWP, 2006). Still this rate includes working any number of hours, and in 2004, half of all employed single parents were working part-time (ONS, 2006). Part-time work tends to be low-paid, it can involve atypical hours, is more insecure and provides less working rights, tends to be concentrated in the service sector and provide fewer opportunities for advancement (Millar et al, 2006). Single parent mothers are much less likely than other mothers to be in managerial, professional jobs, and more likely to be in elementary ones (Barnes et al, 2004; Lyons et al, 2006). The introduction of tax credits has resulted in 36% increase in earnings between 1998-2002 (Gregg and Harkness, 2003). Still this mostly relates to single parents who are working over 16 hours a week, and is an average gain, which includes those who earn above the minimum wage. Sutherland (2002) found that the average gain on the minimum wage was £34.03 a week, which is not much at all considering that single parents that use formal childcare have to pay at least 20% towards its very high cost. Although the introduction of tax credits has meant that the risk of poverty for low-paid single parents has decreased significantly, and even more than for couple families where only one parent is in work or both parents work part-time, it is still significant at 20% in 2001 (Millar and Gardiner, 2004).

The relatively lower earning capacity that single parents have is linked to lower qualifications. Although there has been a decline in the proportion of mothers with no qualification, single parent mothers are more likely to have no qualification than married mothers (Kiernan et al 1998). In 2004, 41% of single parent mothers had either no qualification or very low ones⁹, compared to 25% of mothers in couple families (Lyons et al, 2006). In general single parents in receipt of social assistance¹⁰, have a

⁹ GCSE grade D-G only

¹⁰ Income Support

very low qualifications. In 2000, 50% had no qualification and no relevant work skills or experience. Around one in five had no work experience at all and another 46% reported having low-self confidence (Lessof et al, 2001). The importance of increasing soft skills amongst single parents was first recognised by the 1998 Education and Employment Select Committee, which recommended training opportunities to increase self-confidence amongst single parents.

Low morale has been shown to be linked to poverty and living in social housing: those in receipt of social assistance, with low qualifications, and with poor work experience are more likely to have low morale (Marsh and Rowlingson, 2003). Single parents are 2 to 3 times as likely to experience common mental health disorders as couples with children (Gould, 2006). According to the Social Exclusion Unit (2004) report on mental health and social exclusion, 28% of single parents suffered from common mental health problems such as anxiety, panic disorders, depression and post-natal depression, compared to one in six of the general population. The report also notes the link between financial problems and mental health, with the former being the most common cited cause of depression. There is a strong association between women's poverty and common mental health problems (WBG, 2005). Mental health issues are also likely to be linked to the high rate of domestic violence experienced by single parents, four out of ten of the British Lone Parent Cohort study had experiences of domestic violence (Marsh and Vegeris, 2004).

As we have seen, the latest FACS sweep reports that children in single parent families are more likely to experience physical ill-health or disability than those who live with two parents and they are also more likely to have a parent who is ill or disabled. This increases their poverty risk, because it acts as a barrier to their parent employment. In 2002, 26% of single parents had a child with disability, and 19% of all children living in a single parent family had a disability in comparison to 15% of those that live with two parents. Single parents not in work and those working less than 16 hours are more likely to have a child with ill-health or disability (Barnes et al, 2004). The rate of ill health for single parents on benefit with ill health has doubled from 1991-1999, arguably evidence of long term effects of poverty (OPF, 2005). 16% of single parent mothers that took part in the latest FACS sweep reported a long-standing illness or disability compared to 9% of mothers in couples (Lyon et al, 2006). The most predominant types of health problems are those affecting mobility, respiratory and mental health mainly depression

(Barnes et al, 2004). Many studies indicate that ill-health and disability are key barriers to employment. Almost two out of three of single parents and over half of mothers in couples with a longstanding illness that took part in the FACS latest sweep, said this affected the kind of work they could or the place where they could work (Lyon et al, 2006). A recent qualitative study of single parents with ill health, found that those on health related benefits perceived ill health as their principal work barrier. For those on social assistance, poor health interacted with other key work barriers (Caseburn and Britton, 2004).

Besides health, single parents experience a number of barriers to employment. The three most frequent cited reasons by single parents for not being in work are in order of importance: desire to avoid spending too much time away from children; cost and availability of childcare; health considerations (Lyons et al, 2006). Higher transport costs to work and affordable childcare are also more of an issue for lone mothers (Barnes et al, 2004). Recently it has been recognised that much of the barriers that single parents encounter when trying to gain employment, continue to be barriers once they are in employment and reduce their ability to stay in it. Single parents are twice as likely as other parents to 'cycle' back to welfare (Evans et al 2004). As yet we have no conclusive evidence on why this is, but we know that those who are low-paid, or have ill-health are more likely to cycle back on welfare. Single parent job exiters are more likely to have young children and more than one child in comparison to those who are persistently employed (ibid.). Recent qualitative research on single parent mothers that have just moved into employment (Millar, 2006) suggests that financial and job insecurity is also a key issue. Achieving security, financial and employment, was very important for these parents, who had often experienced a lot of insecurity in their lives, but was very hard to achieve. Most of the participants felt that they were marginally better off, i.e. they could afford treats for the children, or pay bills etc. But achieving a clear sense of how much extra money they actually had to rely on was quite difficult and took time. Most had to budget for new extra work related costs, such as transport, housing, council tax benefit, and childcare. Although child support payments and tax credits were vital in enabling these mothers to work, the former were irregular, and tax credit entitlements were unclear with common experiences of overpayment claw-back. Once in work some of the single parent mothers found they had to start repaying back debts. Being able to work 16 hours was key for financial reasons but the process of

getting that work was not straightforward, often requiring time and effort. It was common to have temporary jobs or job changes in an attempt to get a 16-hour job.

Juggling employment, with parenting responsibilities single-handedly is very difficult. Research indicates that even for those single parent mothers in well-paid professional occupations, balancing work with family responsibilities is very hard and often results in job exit (Gill and Davidson, 2000). In a recent employment survey (MORI, 2001), single parents identified 'paid time off' as vital to achieving a work-family balance. Bell et al (2005) found that coordination of work/education and childcare was very time consuming and difficult, and sometimes resulted in job exit. A qualitative study of single parents that moved into work through the government employment program, the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), found that they encountered problems of sustainability, as some employers were not responsive to their need to take time off for when their children were ill. For some their jobs became unsuitable because they had not enough time to care for their children (Lewis et al, 2000). Evidence from the Employment Retention and Advancement demonstration programmes (Hoggart et al, 2006) shows that difficulties in retaining employment for single parents centred around managing parenting responsibilities, breakdown of childcare arrangements and inflexible working conditions.

A key reason why children in single parent families are more at risk of poverty is because their parents, mostly women, have single-handed responsibility to provide and care for them and the time and work they put in caring for their children is unrecognised and unpaid. A recent child-centred study by Ridge and Millar (2006), which explored the experiences of children whose single parent had recently started paid work, brings new and refreshing findings. Work had a negative effect on the time available together, and their social lives in general. This was particularly difficult for the younger children. Ideally they would have preferred part-time work for their mothers, but they were making important time and money trade off, and overall they preferred this new family situation. For the children the marginal financial gains, such as being able to afford transport, pocket money and equipment, had a very positive impact on their ability to feel included in schools and peer activities, which was a key domain of their experiences of social exclusion. Although their self-esteem had increased as a result of having a parent 'in work', and they were aware of the positive impact on their mothers well-being, they were also aware of the emotional and physical costs that their mothers

encountered, and they took on responsibilities in order to enable them to stay in work. They took on chores and the care of their siblings, some on a regular basis and some to provide occasional time off for their mothers. Some supported their mothers emotionally and occasionally would choose to go to school when ill, or accepted childcare arrangements that they did not like very much. The authors conclude that rather than continue to focus on long-term outcomes for children, such as educational achievement, policies should look at children's current experiences, and aim to promote welfare in work by taking into account the needs and roles of both children and parents. Indeed recent FACS data indicates that differences in school achievement amongst children are related to work status rather than family form. Those children living in jobless families were less likely to be perceived by their parents as 'above average', to receive help with homework, and have parents who aspired for them to gain post compulsory education. They were also more likely to be excluded from school. Differences in family structure show almost twice as many children in single parent families as having special educational needs and more likely to have been punished at school (Lyons et al, 2006).

The Ridge and Millar (2006) study is also interesting because it links changes in parent working status with children's increase in self-esteem dimension of social inclusion. Many single parents experience stigma and prejudice which lower confidence and self-esteem (Alert et al, 1998; MacDermott, 1998). Since the early 1980's single parent families have been discriminated and stigmatized by a political and media discourse that defined them as welfare dependent benefit scroungers and as a cause of social and moral decline. Since 1997 the discourse has become much less harsh and the nature of stigma has changed. Single parenthood is not to be stigmatised, although it is still not an ideal type of family form; marriage is advocated as the foundation of a fair society. In this context as Pascall (1999) argues, single parents are simply tolerated, and only if they are 'in work'. The notion of social exclusion held by this current Government equates to economic inclusion, i.e. paid work (Levitas, 1998). In this context the responsible citizen is one that 'works', and single parents who are unable or not ready to do paid work because of their unpaid parenting work, continue to be stigmatised. In this respect, it is not surprising, yet unsatisfactory, that the 'desire to avoid spending too much time away from children' is not sufficiently understood as a barrier to employment. Clearly both single parents and their children place an important value on the time spent together and domestic and childcare is 'work', albeit unpaid. In this respect an analysis

of the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, which compares social exclusion for single parent mothers and mothers in couples, in the following dimensions, poverty, labour market, service exclusion and exclusion from social relations (Bradshaw et al, 2000), is very interesting. Overall they found that a higher proportion of single parent mothers were socially excluded, except in relation to accessing services, confinement to the home and contact with friends and families. Single parent mothers were more likely to be socially excluded from the labour market, and if in paid work they were less likely to be socially excluded, but this was purely as a result of increase in income, because income poverty for single parent mothers was significantly correlated with many dimensions of social exclusion. On the contrary mothers in couples in paid work were just as likely as those not in paid work to be socially excluded and overall slightly more likely to suffer from time poverty which excluded them from having regular contact with friends or family, precisely because they had to juggle paid work and child care.

In conclusion, although a parent in paid work is a key route to escape poverty and social exclusion for children living in single parent families in England, the low human capital, health constraints and the time they need to care for their children, seriously constrain the ability of their mothers¹¹ to gain sustainable employment. When they are in employment, children play important caring roles in order for them to sustain it. The issue of 'time to care' is therefore vital for understanding how and whether children in single parent families experience poverty and social exclusion. However, the single parent category is a heterogeneous group and in this respect it is important not to underestimate how social divisions can impact on the risk and experience of child poverty. In terms of gender, we have already seen that single parent fathers tend to be ex-married, older and have older children. They are also much more likely to be in work, and to work full time and twice as likely to work in managerial professional jobs (Barnes et al, 2004). Ethnicity is also strongly associated with income poverty: over half of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children and around 40% of Chinese and of Black children are poor (CPAG, 2006). Children from Black and mixed ethnic groups are more likely than white children, and Asian and Chinese children, to be living with a single parent mother. In 2001 85% of Indian families were headed by a married couple (ONS, 2006). Just over half of all mixed raced families, and half of black families were headed by a single parent mother in comparison to 23% of white families (ONS, 2004b).

¹¹ As we have seen single parent fathers are more likely to be in full-time work.

Rowlingson and McKay (2005) have shown that differences amongst working class and middle class women in terms of whether they become single parents and how they experience single parenthood should not be underestimated. A working class girl has 6 times more chances to become a single parent mother than a middle class one. This is partly because young middle class women are more likely to terminate a pregnancy, because this would be an obstacle to their future career and marriage opportunities, opportunities that are not equally available to working class women, who instead see the advent of a child as a positive transition into adulthood. Working class women are also more likely to separate than middle class ones. Once they become single parents, working class women are also less likely to be employed and receive maintenance, and more likely to experience hardship. Still some middle class women experience difficulties that working class ones do not, especially when their economic status worsens dramatically. Although most single parents express a desire to work at some point in their lives, their employment and parental childcare orientations are diverse and complex. Single parent mothers are diverse in the way in which they perceive their identity and responsibilities as mothers. Some see this to mean full time mothering, whilst others see themselves as both breadwinners and mothers. It is not the child's age per se which determines such orientations and decisions, as Duncan and Edwards (1999) have found this diversity is patterned along social class, race and age. They also found that this varied across spatial differences across nations and across different neighbourhoods, characterised by different discourses on single parent motherhood and gendered patterns of employment.

3.6.2. Children in Single Parent Families and Current Policies in England

The UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006-2008

The NAP on Social Inclusion remit rests with the Department for Work and Pension. Interestingly as part of the consultation process in developing the strategic plan, the Department for Work and Pensions worked alongside “Get Heard”, one of the largest projects undertaken in the UK to involve people with first-hand experience of poverty to give their views on government policies designed to combat poverty. A percentage of those involved were single parents, with the Single Parent Action Network drawing many into the process. Children and young people under 16 were not included.

The ‘Get Heard’ contributions are presented as an annex to the main government report (Annex 5) with some quotes from participants in the main text. The main report acknowledges some of the issues raised through ‘Get heard’ such as: *‘the need to join policies and services more effectively at local level; access to childcare and the need for more support for lone parents with disabled children; many encountered problems with tax credits claims; delays in implementing changes with the Child support system.* It also states that *‘Get Heard’ participants were in favour of training and express concerns about variety of provision, and lack of support during the transition into work;* and that participants stress the link between discrimination and social exclusion, particularly in relation to mental illness and disability (DWP, 2006 p-4-6). Action to tackle discrimination is a key objective of the NAPS 2006-08. Still many of the issues raised were not taken up in the main report.

The NAPS 2006-08 report states that the key elements of the child poverty strategy are to: *‘support and promote financial security for poor families in and out of work and increasing incomes through participation in the labour market; breaking cycles of deprivation through early-years support and education; supporting parents in providing better outcomes for their children’* (DWP, 2006, p vi).

Single parent families figure as a key category in relation to the NAP policy objective 1: *‘eradicating child poverty’* and objective 2: *‘increasing labour market participation’*. The reduction of joblessness amongst single parent families is seen as the best way to reduce child poverty and social exclusion for these families. Key measures are:

continuing to raise the level of child tax credit and minimum wage; reforming the Child Support Agency and simplifying the tax credit system; increase in the frequency of work focus interviews and work related activity premium for those single parents who rely on social assistance; the development of work taster programs and testing of the employment advancement and retention programs; expansion of child care provision and encouraging parents to engage with formal childcare which are beneficial for child development; continue to raise standards in education through new resources for tuitions in schools and engaging parents in children's education; narrowing the social and ethnic gap in achievement and school attendance through the Every Child Matters programme.

In what follows we examine most of the NAP 2006-2008 measures, but before doing so we put the NAPS in the context of current government policy, which brought the eradication of child poverty through the reduction of joblessness and '*making work pay*' central to much government policy.

Child poverty takes centre stage

In 1998, one year after New Labour came into government Tony Blair made an historic pledge to eradicate child poverty by 2020, which signalled a very welcome change in the political and policy climate. Under the previous government children were not conceived as a public good, and responsibility for their economic and social welfare was perceived to lie in the private realm of the family sphere. By then the UK had the worst record of child poverty in Europe, and the third worse record amongst 25 developed countries (Bradshaw, 2006) with 4.5 million children living below the poverty line. Since then a number of new provisions have been put in place with the overarching aim of eradicating child poverty. As Ridge (2003b) argues social security provision for children is underpinned by a number of intents such as poverty relief; investment in children; recognition of the cost of children; horizontal distribution towards families; citizenship rights and reinforcement of parental responsibilities. As we will see, under the current government the investment goal has taken priority in the eradication of child poverty.

Child poverty eradication measures are centred on four main strategies. The reduction of ‘joblessness’¹² amongst single parents, and more recently encouraging second earners in two parent families, has been the primary strategy. This is to be achieved through employment programs and by boosting childcare and flexible employment. Linked to this is the ‘making work pay’ strategy. Financial support for the cost of children has also been altered dramatically through the introduction of tax credits. Very recently a reform of the Child Support Agency (CSA) has been announced which focuses more on eradicating child poverty than on the reinforcement of biological fathers’ financial responsibility. Since 1997, education has been seen as a primary focus of government policy. Rather than being underpinned by an understanding of the needs of poor children, such initiatives are underpinned by a notion of ‘citizen of the future’ (Lister, 2003, Ridge 2003a) and considerations for social and economic stability. Rather than encouraging ‘*equity and inclusion in schools*’ (Ridge, 2006) and addressing the financial costs of schooling, the focus has been placed on improving educational achievement, through the promotion of parental ‘choice’ and by tackling problematic behaviour and truancy with an increasingly punitive stance that places the onus on parents.

Reducing child poverty by reducing joblessness and making work pay

The single parent 70% employment target to be achieved by 2010, was first set in the 2000 pre budget report (HM Treasury, 2000). In 1998 the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was introduced nationally. This is a voluntary programme, providing individual advice, information on finding a job, access to childcare and training and other work-related programmes. Since 2005 a New Deal Plus for single parents has been piloted in some areas of the country, which includes further features such as a £40 in work credit, a £20 work search premium, a work emergency fund, childcare tasters and mentoring opportunities. The current welfare reform has announced that single parents whose youngest child is at secondary school will be automatically entitled to a £20 premium if they agree to engage in work related activities, such as training, voluntary work etc (DWP, 2006a). Unfortunately this latest reform has also increased conditionality,

¹² The actual term used by Government is ‘worklessness’ but here we use the term joblessness because this captures the fact that when a single parent has no paid job s/he still does care work, albeit unpaid.

although single parents unlike others can continue to rely on social assistance¹³ (Income Support-IS) while being exempted from work tests. The frequency of work focused interviews that single parents have to attend has been increased significantly: single parents have to agree to an action plan, but are not obliged to undertake any of the actions detailed in the plan. If they fail to attend interviews sanctions are applied. Evidence (Joyce et al, 2001) indicates that sanctions are rare and only used as a last resort, but their impact is very detrimental on children, with parents having to forgo extras such as pocket money or trips for children, getting into debt and increased stress levels.

Another crucial strategy is to 'make work pay'. The Government has introduced the National Minimum Wage (MW)¹⁴. The modernisation of the tax and benefit system is also crucial to this strategy, as well as in general increasing support for the cost of children, whether their parent(s) is in paid work or not. Three features characterise this modernisation. Redistribution towards families with children has increased, for example benefit expenditure on children went up 66% between 1991/2 and 2001/02 (DWP, 2002). Working Family Tax Credit was introduced in 1999, and more recently made available to all low-paid workers and renamed Working Tax Credit (WTC). Parent(s) have to work at least 16 hours a week to be eligible for it, whilst others have to work 30 hours a week. The WTC is means-tested and includes a Childcare Tax Credit element, whereby those using registered formal childcare, can claim up to 80% of their childcare costs to a maximum of £300 a week for two children or more. Redistribution towards families is not differentiated by family type anymore. Single parents and couple families receive the same family premium of tax credit. In England for the last 60 years the child benefit (CB) has been paid to all families with children under 16 or 19 if in full time education, currently £17 a week for first child and £11 for a subsequent child. Until 1998, this included a premium for children living in single parent families, which was abolished by the current government, as the aim was to support children regardless of the family type in which they live (DSS, 1998).

¹³ In England there is also a Housing Benefit (HB) to cover rent. Those who are on IS, Job Seeker Allowance (JSA-unemployment benefit) and Incapacity Benefit (IB-health related) are entitled to the full amount, with a 40% deduction rate for those who are in receipt of Working Tax Credit.

¹⁴ Currently £5.35 for those aged over 22, £4.45 for those aged over 18 to 21 and £3.30 for those aged 16-17 years.

At the same time the Married Man Tax Allowance was abolished and in April 2003 the integrated Child Tax Credit (CTC) was introduced, to run alongside CB. This was a significant change, because all of the child related elements in benefits¹⁵ and tax credits were now brought together with the aim of creating “a seamless and transparent system of support for children...portable and secure income bridge spanning welfare to work” (HM Treasury, 1999 p.39). This resulted in an increase in the amount of income received for those on IS. The CTC is paid to the main carer and means-tested. Those who rely on IS or other benefits are entitled to the maximum amount: when they move into work the entitlement continues and the amount is reduced according to how much they earn. The maximum income threshold is quite high at £58,000. CTC is a clear example of the third feature of the current system of support for children, progressive universalism i.e. all are entitled but those on lower incomes get much more. Indeed the 2006 budget announced that the universal CB will continue to be increased with inflation whilst the child element of CTC will be increased in line with average earnings. Many believe that this approach is problematic (Bennet and Dormat, 2006; SPAN, 2006; WBG, 2006) because its means-tested nature results in lower take-up and marginal deduction rates if earnings go up. Many families, amongst whom many are single parents, have experienced income insecurity and hardship as a result of having to pay back CTC. Overpayment is partly an administration issue, but is mostly an issue of design. The CTC is based on a ‘light touch scheme’. Means-testing takes place only once a year, with the award being calculated on the previous year’s income. Yet changes in circumstances throughout the current year need to be reported and if this results in a reduction in award they need to be repaid back within the year (Howards, 2004). Least but not last, progressive universalism signals a reduction in the importance of the principle of collective social responsibility for children as individual citizens in their own right, regardless of their parent income or status (Bennet and Dormat, 2006; Ridge, 2003b). Others argue that the most cost effective and single mechanism to halve child poverty by 2010 is to increase the CTC much faster than earnings (Hirsch, 2006).

Recently a reform of the CSA has been announced, in line with the reduction of joblessness and making work pay strategies. The Child Support Act of 1991, was underpinned by traditional notions of gender relations, which saw the reinforcement of biological fathers responsibility to pay maintenance to their ex-partners as a key route to

¹⁵ IS, JSA, IB, WTC, HB.

reduce benefit expenditure, as most single parent mothers at the time were relying on IS. Mothers who refused to name the father of their children, were to have their benefit cut by 40%, unless they could prove that there was a significant risk to their children's welfare. Yet because maintenance was fully counted for means-testing of IS, they and their children did not gain anything extra from receiving this maintenance (Kiernan et al, 1998). This policy was very unpopular amongst single parents and their ex-partners, and the agency was never successful at achieving fathers' compliance. Only a third of single parents receive regular maintenance (Barnes et al, 2004) and those with voluntary private arrangements and those in paid work are more likely to receive it (Lyons et al, 2006). The current reform is still in its infancy but it is noticeable that the main drive is a concern for reducing poverty amongst all children, i.e. including those who are on IS. Single parents on IS will not automatically be referred to the CSA as the role of the agency is to be reduced to those cases where parental voluntary arrangement is not possible to achieve. There is also discussion about disregarding the whole maintenance in IS calculations, as is the case with WTC. But expenditure concern seems likely to result in an increase in the amount that single parents on IS can keep. At present those on IS can keep £10 a week.

Ignoring housing need

A key limitation of the *'making work pay'* strategy is the current trends of increase in childcare and housing costs (Hirsh, 2006). Increased earnings are offset by a 40% housing benefit taper on tax credit. Rises in MW are not effective as they affect entitlement to tax credits and housing benefit (Harker, 2006). Furthermore the policy and legislative framework in relation to housing in England rarely makes specific mention of single-parent households, and does not take into account the impact of bad housing conditions, and temporary accommodation on ability to gain and stay in employment. Although we know that single-parents and their children are more likely to be in public or private rented, in temporary accommodation, and experiencing bad housing conditions than those in two-parent families (Clarke and Joshi, 2003: 19-20). Furthermore, The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) provide a 'fact sheet' on 'Housing in the UK', and within this refer to national statistics, when stating that 'the primary causes of homelessness in the UK are the breakdown of relationships and rent or mortgage arrears' (ESRC online). Additionally, in drawing together a range of existing studies, Mitchell (2006) highlights the impact that poor housing and

homelessness can have on children's lives and their subsequent development. According to this source, children who experience poor housing conditions may have up to 25% higher risk of severe ill-health (including mental ill-health) or disability during their childhood or early adulthood (Mitchell, 2006). Moreover Mitchell (2006) adds that behavioural difficulties are also evident amongst children deemed as living in poor housing conditions.

During the first years of this century, the Government have published a plethora of policy statements in respect of housing (DfETR, 2000; ODPM, 2000, 2004b, 2005) including the Housing Act of 2004. The overarching Government language is that 'we should strive towards giving everyone the opportunity of a decent home' (DfETR, 2000, foreword) and within this a list of key priorities for action have been developed. The needs of single parents and their families, however, appear to be subsumed within this discourse rather than being explicitly addressed. For example, the Supporting People strategy (ODPM, 2004b) is specifically aimed at bringing together services that meet 'support' and 'housing needs' for particular groups of people considered to be 'vulnerable'. Included in these groups of people are 'teenage parents', 'people at risk of domestic violence', 'homeless families with support needs' and 'young people at risk'. Thus, overall the discourse incorporates, social housing, vulnerable people, homelessness, risk, quality standards and opportunity, all of which may have relevance to single parent families, but none of which are specifically related to their needs.

Unfortunately the housing needs of single parents seem to emerge only in welfare dependency discourses, which dominated in the early 90's, when '*lone mothers featured prominently in the housing policy debates in the media and in Parliament*' (Kiernan et al, 1998: 235), with concern being articulated that welfare and housing policy led to 'perverse incentives' to being a single parent, in order to attract certain benefits, including financially supported accommodation. Yet during this period, the government policy rhetoric formulated in their White Paper 'Our Future Homes: opportunity, choice, responsibility' (DoE, 1995) indicated their concern to move towards an overall objective of 'a decent home within reach of *every* family' (emphasis added).

A problematic separation between parent and child welfare

Another key limitation of the making work pay and joblessness reduction strategy is that the focus on eradicating child poverty has also resulted in an artificial separation of

children and parent(s) welfare. In the first place, the children and adult element of benefits and tax credits have been separated, and whilst the latter has increased substantially over the last few years the former has decreased. As the Women Budget Group (2005) has argued so convincingly, the well-being of mothers cannot be divorced from that of their children. When in poverty it is mostly women that take responsibility to make ends meet sometimes going without for the benefit of their children and partners. This has a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health, which can affect their ability to parent, and certainly impacts on their ability to gain and stay in employment. Forgone earnings results in increase child poverty. Most single parents are women, and a significant number suffer from low-morale, mental and physical ill-health. Clearly achieving a reduction in child poverty requires increasing the income available to the children and single parents that are relying on social assistance and/or health related benefits. Hirsch (2006) has argued that significant increases of CTC will not eradicate child poverty and that redistribution measures in the form of raising IS levels are also crucial and affordable given that the number of those paying taxes has actually risen. Harker (2006) also argues that the child poverty target will not be met without selective increases in the value of some adult benefits. The focus on reducing joblessness amongst single parents, has resulted in a 'work-first' approach, which has not worked for the most disadvantaged single parents who experience multiple barriers to employment, and are also more likely to 'cycle' back to welfare (Evans et al, 2004). Exploring new ways to support those who cannot work is therefore paramount, as a significant number of single parents will not be in paid work whilst caring for very young children, and some with complex needs may never be in a position to be able to work. The centrality of paid work in the current government welfare reform is meant to go hand in hand with '*security for those who cannot*' (DSS, 1998).

Secondly this child parent separated model underpins the focus on reducing joblessness amongst single parents and fails to fully recognise the importance that children and parents place on 'time to care' and the everyday impact that time poverty has on the children's own experiences of social exclusion, as they end up taking on domestic and childcare responsibilities (Millar and Ridge, 2006). Children living in single parent families are at greater risk of suffering the impacts of time poverty, because the reduction of joblessness amongst their parents is a key policy priority, and because single parents have to juggle employment and childcare responsibilities single-

handedly. This narrow focus on social inclusion as parental employment runs counter to other government concerns over 'parenting deficit', youth anti-social behaviour, and children school achievement and exclusion. An understanding of the ways in which income poverty and time poverty interact is missing from this agenda, and this is most clearly visible in the childcare and flexible employment policies. Despite great progress the childcare promise has been undermined by the marketisation of day care provision, and as such is yet to be delivered.

A National Childcare Strategy was first launched in 1998, with the aim of providing accessible, flexible and affordable quality childcare. More recently there has been a goal of providing 'wrap around' childcare for 3-14 year olds through extended school programs, and through the development of multi-agency children centres in every community. Free part-time nursery care for 3 and 4 years olds is also to be expanded to 15 hours a week (HM Treasury, 2004). This was an extremely important development because no government had ever embraced the challenge of expanding day care, or doubled capacity since 1997. In 2006 there are 1.2 million childcare places, 800 children centres reaching 650, 000 children, extended school programs in 5,000 schools and 12.5 hours free early education for every 3 and 4 year old. Despite this progress, access is not equal with children in 'jobless' households, in single parent families, and with special education needs, being less likely to benefit from this expansion (Stanley et al, 2006). Key issues are around quality and affordability of childcare. Despite the significant increase in government spending, from £1 billion in 1996/7 to 5.5 in 2007/8, the reliance on market provision has increased costs of childcare, which are amongst the highest in the developed world. Therefore even those single parents that can qualify for the CCTC cannot afford to pay the remaining 20% of costs. Market expansion also raised important issues for quality of provision. Confidence in formal day care remains low amongst single parents, who tend to prefer informal childcare from relatives and friends, partly because it offers continuity and trust and because it is embedded in personal relationships of love. CCTC cannot be used to pay for this, and this decreases its supply and sustainability (Land, 2002; Mckay, 2002).

This highlights another important limitation of the childcare strategy, the assumption that marketised formal day care can meet all the needs of parent(s) in paid work and of their children. Atypical hours of employment are a characterising feature of the flexible

English labour market. 53% of employed single parent mothers work atypical hours (La Valle et al, 2002) i.e. working w/ends, or evenings/nights, thus their need for childcare cannot be met through 8-6pm 'wrap around' care. Furthermore children's needs are complex and sometimes unpredictable, resulting in breakdown of childcare arrangements, e.g. when children are ill or unhappy with the kind of childcare they received. The understanding of such needs is embedded in the context of personal relationships of love. Clearly a system of formal childcare, no matter how flexible can never fully replace the need for parental childcare, thus informal childcare (Giullari and Lewis, 2005), and policies to guarantee 'time to care' is key. The recent Work Family Act, 2006 has not gone far enough, as its main focus has been on extended paid maternity leave and in making it transferable to fathers. Parental leave remains unpaid, so single parents have no right to take 'paid leave' when their children are sick. The right to request flexible working remains weak, as the employer can refuse it and is only available to parents who have children under six years of age. Clearly childcare and flexible working strategies are not informed by an understanding of the difficulties that single parents encounter when managing employment and child care responsibilities single-handedly, thus ignoring the impact of their time poverty on their children's lives and experiences of social exclusion.

'Citizen worker of the future' and education policy

Last but not least the adult child separated model results in one of the most fundamental limitations of the child poverty eradication strategy. This strategy is driven by adult experiences and concerns. When children are taken into consideration the focus is not on their actual experiences of social exclusion and poverty as children, but on the risk that they will face in adult life and their implications for the economy and social stability (Ridge, 2003a). The investment goal is taken as the key priority and children as 'citizens' in their own right with their own priorities and concerns are ignored, whilst the focus is on children as 'citizens of the future' (Lister, 2003). This limitation becomes most visible in education policy.

Education has been identified as a key area of intervention in the lives of children experiencing social exclusion and poverty, particularly those seen as at risk of failing at schools (Ermisch et al, 2001). Education and training can provide a means to escape poverty for those who are economically disadvantaged (Machin and McNally, 2006);

helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve in school is widely recognised as an effective route out of poverty (Blanden and McNally, 2005). Yet obstructively, educational achievement levels remain closely allied with socio-economic background. Educational disadvantage is identified as starting at a very young age and the achievement gap widens as children move up through the education system (Feinstein, 2003) and (DfES, 2002). This leads to significant differences in final educational achievement levels between children from high and low socio-economic backgrounds (Blanden and McNally, 2005).

Encouragingly, the recent government education White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (2005) acknowledges these facts, stating that ‘a child’s educational achievements are still too strongly linked to their parent’s social and economic background – a key barrier to social mobility.’ Current government policy to address this issue is centred on ‘choice’, as outlined in the latest Education and Inspections Act that came into force in November 2006. The Act places a duty on local authorities to promote ‘choice’; in tandem empowering all schools to become Trust schools, devolving as much decision-making to them as possible, including admissions policy. However, it is questionable whether choice will deliver a reduction in achievement differences between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. In fact there is contra evidence to suggest that choice may even widen the achievement gap. Parents from higher socio-economic groups appear to have better information about and understanding of school performance league tables, and have the financial means to live near high performing schools, as reflected in concomitant rising house prices (Blanden and McNally, 2005). Recognising these issues, the Act does place a duty on local authorities in England to promote fair access to educational opportunity, supported by a strengthened School Admissions Code with clear guidelines on uniform and transport policies, provision of free transport for the most disadvantaged, and advice and assistance to parents in expressing a school preference. Nonetheless, schools benefit from taking the best academic performers since parents and government policy makers focus on performance league tables; and having Trust status will enable a school to set their own admissions status albeit subject to the School Admissions Code. Therefore it is likely higher income will continue to equate with greater capacity to leverage any advantages from choice (Blanden and McNally, 2005).

Furthermore the investment strategy dominates education policy. This sees children as future workers and is mostly concerned with implications of their educational achievement for social and economic stability, than with their needs of children as such. It is not surprising that much of this policy focuses on raising children's academic performance, rather than '*encouraging equity and inclusion in schools*' (Ridge, 2006: 35). Fendler (2001: 181) also argues that much current educational practice is intended to meet new demands from the state and the flexible labour market, in particular flexible ways of 'being' rather than reflecting the rights and needs of children. Indeed the Education Act 2002, a key piece of education legislation, focuses on improving educational standards. Raising standard initiatives recognises to some extent structural disadvantage. The extended school initiative is supposed to provide by 2010, wrap around childcare (see above); study support activities; parenting support programs; swift and early referral to specialist support services and sports/ arts facilities. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 puts into effect proposals made in the Youth Green Paper, *Youth Matters* (2005) by placing a duty on local authorities in England to promote the well-being of young people aged 13-19 years, through access to educational and leisure-time activities and facilities. The latest budget, March 2007, informed by the *Children and Young Peoples Review*, has announced tuition funds for 10 hours one to one tuition for 300,000 under attaining pupils by 2010-11 in English and Maths.

Furthermore the investment strategy has undermined the rhetoric of children's voices. The Education Act 2002 requires schools to consult with pupils, as well as parents, local authorities and community to ensure that interventions are shaped around the needs of children. Likewise 'Every Child Matters' (2004), the cornerstone for the government's agenda as a catalyst for change in the development and delivery of services to children, young people and their families, places children centrally within the remit of social policy rather than within the care of their parents and schools (Williams, 2004). This key strategy sees schools as being "at the heart of the community" and therefore well placed to take up the challenges of making a reality of the intention of 'Every Child Matters'. Although the government has consulted with children in the framing of some of the 'Every Child Matters' objectives, government agencies have since done little to involve them in their ensuing development. As part of this process, Every Child Matters is centred within statutory services and agencies, in particular children's centres and schools, with very little community and family involvement (Williams, 2004). Monk

(cited in Henricson and Bainham, 2005: 36) observes that there is an absence of legal recognition of children's rights in education. It is suggested that this may be due to the fact that the school as an institution is geared up to guarantee stability and in which parents have a legal right to have their voice heard (under the Local Education Act, 1996), but not children (Hart, 1997: Hayes, 2004).

Moreover, in spite of the universal objectives for children, 'Every Child Matters' has within its multi-disciplinary framework, more specific targets with regard to children considered to be at risk, in particular children in care, teenage mothers and children excluded from school. The Education Act 2002, and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 focus on children's school behaviour and exclusion, and create a statutory right for the first time for school staff to discipline pupils. Exclusion is taken to mean excluding a child from a maintained school on disciplinary grounds, because of unacceptable behaviour. Fixed term exclusion is a short-term, temporary measure (perhaps for as little as one day) and cannot last for more than 45 school days in the school year. Permanent exclusion means the pupil cannot return to the same school. Their local authority has a duty to provide him with suitable education, either in another school, in a Pupil Referral Unit or by way of home tuition. There are no longer targets to reduce school exclusion, which rose rapidly in the 90's. Targets were criticised by schools because they distorted the enforcement of school behaviour policies, while penalising schools for excluding students hit hardest at those schools with the most challenging students and therefore with the highest levels of exclusions. Instead the adult child separated model surfaces again, informing a punitive stance on school behaviour and exclusion, with the onus firmly placed on parents. School-parental agreement, fines and even prison for parents of children at persistent risk of exclusion have been introduced. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 extends the scope of parenting orders and requires parents to take responsibility for excluded pupils in the first five days of their exclusion. The onus on the parent to provide home care and support for the excluded child is liable to put particular pressure on single parents who are working. They are likely to face the dilemma of losing pay in order to stay home to watch over their child, versus being brought to account for their child being found on the street during school hours.

CHAPTER 4: MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter 4.1: Family Life of Children from Single Parent Families

4.1.1. Diversity of the single parent family unit

The official definition of single parent family fails to perceive the fluid, subjective and dynamic nature of contemporary family life. Like other families, the structure of single parent families changes with time, sometimes quite frequently. Like others, children living in this type of family hold their own definitions of who counts as family. When asked to describe their family, single parent children outlined a wide variety of family types. Some of the family situations have remained consistent over the long-term with the child staying in the same home with one particular parent, usually their mother, but others have tended to fluctuate and change, sometimes quite frequently. For example, the research sample included young people like Elizabeth who have moved between two homes living with different parents for varying periods of time, and those who have lived for a period with other family members such as grandparents and aunts, as well as with different parents.

‘We had two homes. We went over there (dad’s home) for Thursdays and Fridays and on Fridays we slept over till Sunday. That Friday to Sunday happened regularly till they were divorced and then I had to go every other Friday to Sunday.’ (Elizabeth, girl, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Family is often perceived as broader than just the unit with whom children live the majority of time. For example, Annie said she has three ‘daddies’ and lives at one ‘daddy’s’ house as well as the one she shares with her mother, whilst Hannah described her family as encompassing those she lives with as well as her step-siblings and absent father. Concomitantly, many children find ‘single parent family’ an inaccurate descriptor of their family scenario and it is not a term they tend to use or feel at ease with.

‘I’ve got three daddies. Daddy Pete, Daddy Keith and Daddy Steve...She (her mother)got with him then she split up with him, then she got with daddy Keith. Daddy Keith’s got a nice flat...We’ve got two houses.’ (Annie, girl, single parent child, 6 years, urban)

‘I’ve a little sister who lives here, who’s got the same mum as me and another dad. My dad has other children. I’ve an older brother who’s 18 and two older sisters

who are 16 and 17 I think. And I have a little brother who's 12 and another on the way. I see my dad at weekends.' (Hannah, girl, single parent child, 14 years, urban)

4.1.2. Extended family and family friends can offer a crucial support mechanism

Some single parent children spend a considerable amount of time in the care of adults other than their single parent, especially grandparents. For several children like Annie, this time away from home is thought to provide an opportunity for their single parent to have a break and others mention that their grandparents help out with their care whilst their parent works. When prompted, a few children also reveal that it is a means by which they can spend time with their fathers; the grandparents acting as a conduit to enable this to happen.

'At the weekends I go to Nanas. I sleep Saturday and Sunday night...so my mum can get some peace.' (Annie, girl, single parent child, 6 years, urban)

Extended family and family friends also help alleviate some of the impacts of poverty on single parent children by enabling children to participate in leisure activities that their single parent has little or no time for and buying gifts their parent cannot afford. They can additionally give children opportunities to talk about issues that trouble them that their time-pressured parent is unable to offer. For children like Leon, talking in this way is very satisfying since it helps reduce the pressure and stress they experience by not having the opportunity to talk with their single parent.

'I talk to my cousin as we're still very close or my aunty...It does take all the stuff off your chest, you just let it out.' (Leon, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

Spending time with adults other than their single parent is also beneficial for some children because it provides them with alternative views and behaviour approaches in relation to life issues. For example, Awale mentioned how much he liked going out to places with his uncle who always expressed interest in his life and what he was doing at school. Awale perceived his uncle as having some level of responsibility over his behaviour and discipline since when he was badly behaved and angry, it was his uncle who came to talk to him and give advice.

'My uncle takes me out places like to town, to the market, cinema. Thinks about me. Like when I get really angry and he comes round my house and talks to me.

He says not to do that because bad things will happen and I should never do something bad. He's always been there for me.' (Awale, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

From the perspective of single parents, extended family and family friends are often significantly important in supporting them juggle work and care. Many feel that work would not be possible without such help in caring for their children in after-school hours, and helping take children to and from school or to school activities. Those single parents unable to benefit from such valuable help and support can feel more socially isolated and their children can suffer more directly from the effects of poverty.

4.1.3. Perceived benefits of single parenthood

Single parenthood is felt to have some significant advantages. Children believe a key benefit is having a more relaxed home, as opposed to shouting and anger when their two parents had been living together, and having to be involved in their parents' altercations. *'The atmosphere wasn't as relaxed as now. Mum was drinking, smoking and coming in late like six in the morning. Making lies up and making us lie to our dad which made me feel so bad.'* (Secondary school boy, single parent child focus group, rural). Having closer family bonds was perceived as another important advantage with some children, like Isabel, feeling that their single parent family has become a tighter, more loving unit.

'You look after your family more which makes you more of a closer family whereas some people who live in normal families, they're not as close. If you're a single parent family you must have had a rough patch somewhere so it kind of brings you together as a family.' (Isabel, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Teachers and professionals are also very conscious that many of the single parent children they work with benefit from being in a safer, more positive family environment than when living with two parents. *'A lot of the young people prefer the fact that they have got one parent who supports them as opposed to dad being on the scene and hitting mum about. For them it is like things are better now.'* (Female, professional, urban)

Single parents argue that the major advantages of single parenthood are absence of conflict without the constant tension generated by arguments with the other parent, and the fact it is easier to set clear and consistent boundaries in their disciplining of children. Differential parental attitudes to child behaviour were often thought to have acted as a

stimulus for argument and dispute with the other parent. Single parent children also appreciate the clarity and consistency of having only one parent telling them what to do.

‘My life is calmer, quieter and easier in the situation I’m in now than it was when I was married...Also there is no one to argue with about how we kind of do things, you know there were disputes about various things which I don’t have to deal with. So for me it’s better.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

4.1.4. Difficulty for single parents of handling all parental roles

Single parents consistently feel wearing all the different parental hats is extremely demanding and emotionally draining. It is considered by far the biggest challenge of being a single parent. Having sole responsibility and accountability for everything from being the breadwinner, the disciplinarian and the care giver to the family’s emotional succour is a continuous strain. It also means they have very little ‘me’ time when they can take time out and have their own personal life, making it difficult to sustain existing friendships and meet any new friends or potential partners.

‘Playing all the different roles, you are responsible for everything. You are just wearing so many different hats all at the one time and it’s bloody hard work.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Parents from two-parent families consider single parent’s responsibility for handling all the parental roles the key difference between them. They recognise the many advantages of being able to split and share parental roles given the considerable challenges faced in bringing up children. They welcome being able to talk about the planning and decision making, to pass on problems to another person and have time-out away from the children on occasions. Several women from two-parent families had previous experience of being a single mother and appreciated how much easier it is being able to share parental responsibilities, especially the reduction in stress and time pressures. They look back with some incredulity that at one time they had been able to handle everything themselves.

‘I’m not so stressed now so I’ve got more patience. I’m less stressed now as I can let him deal with them when they’re playing up or anything as well. If they’re pushing me to the limit he’ll step in and say listen to your mother.’ (Female, two parent group, secondary school children, rural)

4.1.5. Normality of single parenthood

The research elicited very few examples of children feeling or experiencing any overt stigma as a consequence of living in a single parent family. For the majority of young people interviewed, having a single parent is considered normal, as reflected in the fact that many of their friends and peers live in similar circumstances. Children like Donald do not perceive their family situation to be unusual or a cause for special notice or comment. Neither do they feel they get treated any differently because of their family background.

‘I think we’re just treated like everyone else. It’s become more usual hasn’t it. I don’t think there’s any reason why we should be treated unfairly and people don’t treat us unfairly.’ (Donald, boy, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Parents, teachers and professionals in general feel that societal views about single parenthood have significantly changed over the last fifteen to twenty years as a result of the overall increase in numbers of single parent families. Single parent families have become more familiar, with most people perceived likely to have at least one single parent within their circle of acquaintances. As a consequence of this greater awareness and understanding of single parenthood, single parent children are thought unlikely to be treated differently or discriminated against.

‘Single parenthood is just not an issue that would cause trouble for a child because there’s kind of generations of it in the communities in which these children are living. It’s kind of 70s. The attitudes are different now.’ (Female, secondary school teacher, urban)

Furthermore, there is evidence of respect and admiration of single parents amongst some teachers and parents from two-parent families. They comment warmly and positively on single parents they know who have successfully brought up children on their own. Their admiration stems from appreciating how problematic and demanding it can be to bring up children in a two-parent household, and how much more difficult it must be for a single parent without the emotional, practical and financial support of another adult.

‘I’ve got a friend who’s got four children and she’s brought these four kids up on her own and it makes me admire her. It makes me respect her more because of bringing up two boys and two girls on her own, teenage kids. I think she’s done a

wonderful job on her own.’ (Female, two parent group, secondary school children, urban)

‘A lot of our single mums are extremely competent women who provide excellent role models.’ (Female, secondary school teacher, urban)

However, in more isolated rural communities with very few single parent families, single parenthood can still be a reason for negative comment and stigmatisation. A few single parents living in rural areas mentioned that others sometimes ‘judge’ them negatively on the basis they have made a choice to be single parents. They feel the media is somewhat at fault for this behaviour in that there is still a tendency for the media to portray single parents negatively as ‘second class citizens.’ *‘People judge us - as we made the choice to be single parents.’* (Female, single parent group, primary school children, rural). Young people were living in rural communities in the minority of cases where they referenced being picked on by their peers at school because of having a single parent family. The young people concerned said their peers do not really understand why they have only one parent and so treat them as different and taunt them by claiming it is their fault one of their parents left the family home.

4.1.6. Covert stigmatisation of single parenthood

Nonetheless despite acknowledging an absence of overt stigmatisation of single parent families, some single parents express worries about covert societal criticism, especially in relation to any anti-social behaviour of their children. Several single parents mention being unhappy their children play out on the streets or hang around the estate where they live, for fear the children will get into trouble and other parents will critically link their children’s behaviour to their single parent status.

Furthermore, amongst a few parents from two-parent families, some critical comments were voiced about the financial benefits enjoyed by single parents. Interestingly the women expressing these views had been single parents for a time themselves. Their negativity is directed less at single parenthood per se and more at the fact that they no longer have access to the same benefits they enjoyed whilst a single parent. Nonetheless their sense of being at a financial disadvantage clearly fosters a growing resentment against single parents.

‘When I was a single mum they used to pay part of my mortgage. I used to work part-time, but they gave me money on top of that. I used to have every concession. But because we’re trying to push on, we’re penalised for it as we have more barriers than what we were when we were single mums in my opinion.’ (Female, two parent group, secondary school children, rural)

4.1.7. Children’s relationships with their single parents

The relationship a child has with their single parent, in the majority of situations a mother, is very close and significantly important for the child. Asked what is the best thing about where he lived, Jack said ‘*Being with mummy*’ (Jack, male, single parent child, 6 years, rural). Other younger children reflect the value of this relationship through describing everyday tasks their mothers do for them in ensuring their lives have routines and therefore stability. Some children like Evie, talked about special times with just themselves and their mothers.

‘I love staying up and watching a movie just me and my mum sitting on the sofa.’ (Evie, girl, single parent child, 8 years, urban)

Older children more readily articulate their reliance on their single parent as a source of emotional support and security. They describe their single parent as the first person they turn to for love, affection, attention, reassurance and comfort. In many cases, teenagers feel the bond between them and their single parent is stronger than is the case in two-parent families. They believe this is because they have been through such difficult experiences together, sharing their ensuing emotions, and are therefore more emotionally dependent on each other. A direct consequence of the closeness of this relationship is that the parent’s state of emotional well-being can closely impact on that of the child. If their parent is happy and content this has positive benefits for the child, but if their parent is miserable, angry or depressed there will be inevitable negative repercussions on the feelings of the child. As a result, older single parent children can be very adept at reading the emotions of their parent. For example, a teenage boy living with his father described how he carefully observes the mood his father is in when he comes in from work, before deciding whether or not to talk to him.

‘It’s either been a good day or a bad day for him so I find I try to speak to him and I’ll know what kind of mood he’s in, and if he’s in a bad mood I’ll just leave him for an hour or two to calm down.’ (Secondary school boy, single parent child group, rural)

Some older children feel emotionally responsible for their parent, trying to help their parent deal with stress and depression, providing a listening 'ear' as well as emotional guidance. Several teenage boys gave the impression they are required to be the 'man of the house', mainly in terms of 'looking after' their mum and ensuring she is 'alright'. A few young people are conscious that at times their parent's safety depends on them, for example if the parent has a tendency to drink too much alcohol on occasions. Such roles are generally very difficult for young people to undertake, especially if they are regularly called upon to do so. Some respondents mention that they do not always have access to the full information about what their parent is experiencing and so cannot support them properly. They may also blame themselves when they cannot help their parent who remains upset or miserable. Thomas for example, explained how he often finds his mother crying and is aware she owes a lot of money and is worried about bailiffs, but does not really know the reasons why she is in debt, and finds it difficult to think what he can do to help. He is angry that he has so little money himself because it means he can never really solve her problems and make her happier.

'I just want to help her whatever way I can, but when it's to do with money, well I'm just broke.' (Thomas, boy, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

4.1.8. Importance of quality family time

Interlinked with the close bond between children and their single parent is the importance of spending quality time together. Children's greatest enjoyment associated with family life is spending time with their single parent, sharing activities outside the home. The activities in themselves are often not that important and those mentioned are usually quite simple such as meals or walks together and visits to the park or beach. Less frequent but particularly enjoyable are trips to theme parks like Alton Towers and holidays away including caravanning, camping and staying with relatives. The common ingredient which makes the activities special is that the family is sharing positive 'quality time' together, with the opportunity to really talk and communicate, share jokes and have fun together.

'I go places with mum - we visit places - parks - we went to one with animals - a goat tried to eat my hat.' (Bobby, boy, single parent child, 7 years, urban)

Secondary school children frequently mentioned how they enjoyed being away from home and all the pressures associated with such, and doing something different to the everyday norm. Teenagers like Jade feel that these more relaxed and enjoyable occasions are often the ones when they can really discuss things properly with their parent; the issues and events in their lives which are especially important to them. *'Gives a chance to communicate. You can talk about things. I like to do things like go to the beach or bowling or the cinema. More active.'* (Jade, girl, single parent child, 14 years, urban)

However, the reality is that such family occasions are infrequent and sporadic. As Richard explained, the majority of young people's time spent with their single parent is screen watching, either TV or DVDs, or doing household chores. In such context, communication tends to be limited. When there is any talking it is more likely to be about problems, difficulties and issues to do with day-to-day life. The everyday pressures at home mean that such conversations can often end in some sort of disagreement or argument. Very seldom is there the opportunity for any discussion which is intimate, fun and rewarding. *'Usually when I'm spending time with my mum I'm usually watching TV.'* (Richard, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

4.1.9. Children's relationships with their absent parents

Regular access to and time spent with their absent parent generally induces enjoyment and contentment for single parent children. Older children in particular can feel upset at the attitude and conduct of their absent parent if they have no or very little contact. They tend to believe that if their parent loves them then they would make every effort to see them whenever possible. When this is not the case, they struggle to put a positive light on the evidenced behaviour and it is a source of emotional angst. Leah, for example, described being perplexed by the fact she is expected to instigate contact with her father. She deduced he has little interest in her life since he seldom makes the effort to phone her to find out how she is doing. This makes her feel angry and rejected.

'The most difficult thing is not spending enough time with my dad really. He might like expect me to phone him, but he's a parent so he should be taking care of me and phone me. If he really cared he'd phone me every weekend and see how I was getting on at school, spend time with me and help me do my course work. But he doesn't.' (Leah, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

However, spending time with the absent parent can generate emotional angst in the family home with some children like Abigail being used as the emotional ‘go-between’ the parents. *‘Mum saying stuff about dad, and dad saying stuff about mum, and it’s like I don’t really care, get on with it.’* (Abigail, girl, single parent child, 12 years, rural). Other children because of their close emotional bond with their mother can feel reluctant to express how much they enjoy talking on the phone, spending time with or staying at the home of their other parent, being aware it will cause pain and upset. Equally they realise that expressing such feelings can be used as an emotional weapon if they ever want to hurt their single parent.

4.1.10. Summary

Children’s Voices

- Single parent children perceive ‘family’ as broader than just the unit with whom they live the majority of the time; including step-siblings, and their relatives. They consider ‘single parent family’ an inaccurate descriptor.
- Extended family and family friends are often significantly important in supporting the single parent juggle work and care. Some single parent children spend a considerable amount of time in the care of adults other than their single parent, especially grandparents.
- Extended family can help alleviate some of the impacts of poverty on single parent children - enabling children to participate in leisure activities and buying gifts their parent cannot afford, or giving children opportunities to talk about issues that trouble them that their time-pressured parent is unable to offer.
- The prevalence of single parent families, particularly in an urban context, results in an explicit discourse of normality with the majority of single parent children saying they do not experience stigma. They do not perceive their family situation to be unusual or a cause for interest or response amongst other children.
- Single parenthood is felt to have some significant advantages. A key benefit is having a more relaxed home as opposed to shouting and anger when their two parents were together. Children consider closer family bonds another important advantage, feeling that their single parent family has become a tighter, more loving unit.

- The relationship a child has with their resident single parent is very close and significantly important for the child. Where that relationship is functioning positively and strongly, it provides the essential stability and emotional bedrock for the child to withstand any difficulties associated with changing family circumstances. It enables a child to feel their family is a solid, safe, secure and comfortable unit irrespective of any fluidity in its structure.
- From the child's perspective, it is vitally important for them to spend quality time with their single parent if the relationship with that parent is to be properly sustained and for them to benefit from it. In particular, they enjoy spending time sharing activities outside the home with their single parent, with the opportunity to really talk and communicate, share jokes and have fun together. However, the reality is that such family occasions are infrequent and sporadic.
- The closeness of the bond between a child and their single parent can also have negative outcomes with the child having to take on more adult roles in helping their parent manage poverty. Some children feel emotionally responsible for their parent, trying to help their parent deal with stress and depression, and experiencing hopelessness in their inability to adequately deal with that.
- Regular access to and time spent with their absent parent generally induces enjoyment and contentment for single parent children.
- Older children in particular can feel upset at the attitude and conduct of their absent parent if they have no or very little contact.
- At the same time, spending time with the absent parent can generate emotional angst in the family home with for example, children being used as the emotional 'go-between'.

Single Parent Voices

- Single parents argue the major benefits of single parenthood are absence of conflict and the fact it is easier to set clear and consistent boundaries in their disciplining of children. Nonetheless, they find it difficult and emotionally draining to single-handedly parent and provide financially for their children.
- Overt criticism of single parents and their children is now felt to be confined to areas with few single parents, notably small and isolated rural communities. However, there are manifestations of more covert stigmatisation even in communities where single parenthood is regarded as the norm, with single parents believing their parental status will be blamed for any anti-social

behaviour from their teenage children. The impression that single parents do better than other parents in terms of state handouts also persists.

- Extended family frequently provides the child-care that enables some single parents to work. Those single parents unable to benefit from such valuable help and support can feel more socially isolated and their children can suffer more directly from the effects of poverty.

4.2 Financial Issues Faced by Single Parent Children and their Families

4.2.1. Children's perception of their poverty

Single parent children, especially older children, have a high level of perceptivity and understanding about their family's financial position. They can provide quite a detailed analysis of their family's financial situation reflective of money matters being a regular subject of discussion at home. Many are cognisant of 'being poor.' Younger children recount occasions when their parent did not have enough money for something they wanted. Jason for example, referred to his mother having to be careful about money, *'She just be's careful with money...When it comes to Christmas she said you can't have any because you've already got some money for Christmas and then she forgets to give us it.'* (Jason, boy, single parent child, 10 years, urban). Older children are more acutely aware of their poverty, judging their financial situation comparatively with those people they know. Most concerning for many teenagers is facing the constant worry whether they will have enough money to be able to afford to go out with their friends. Some young people, for example Awale, bemoaned how miserable they feel when their friends regularly go out without them because they cannot afford the activity. Teenage girls often feel constrained in being able to go shopping, a common social event, with their friends. When they can afford to go shopping, they have a clear sense of which types of shop and shopping areas are for 'people like me' and which are for 'posh people'.

'I'm not very happy as there's not enough (money) for us.' (Awale, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

Older children also mention being relatively poor in relation to their peers on the basis of enjoying less frequent family days out and less regular holidays. For most of these children, holidays abroad are a rarity and some have never been abroad. Such family

activities are talking currency at school and so they have a fairly intimate knowledge of what they are missing out on in contrast with their peers. A few children such as Katie, reminisced about times before having a single parent when family trips out were more affordable and so more frequent.

‘We don’t really do a lot as the money my dad gets is mainly for the bills. It’s restricted. So we don’t really go out anymore. That upsets me as we used to go out quite a lot to the beach or theme park or something, but now I just stay at home or go to my friends’ houses.’ (Katie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Comparatively poor home environments can make single parent children reluctant to reciprocate with invitations to stay at their own house after sleepovers shared at friend’s houses. For example, one teenage girl said she would like her family to have a larger kitchen so she could invite her friends for tea. And a teenage boy explained there is very little room in his house to invite friends round. If he had his own bed he would feel ‘normal’, but instead he has to share with his brother. Additionally, unlike their friends, few single parent children receive pocket money and if they do, payments are ad hoc and never something to be relied upon. Some children only receive pocket money if they do extra work around the house to help their parent, but again payment is not always forthcoming. Therefore they are rarely able to spontaneously buy things to treat themselves when their friends do.

Children’s impression of there being ‘only so much money available’ appears a direct consequence of many of their single parents struggling not to fall into debt. Several single parents said because their family lives within a tight financial budget it feels easy to fall into debt. Any unexpected cost such as the heating breaking down and having to pay for repairs, or even the extra cost of a piece of school uniform, can quickly tip the balance from credit to debit. Yet child demands for money and the tears when they are unable to meet basic requests such as money to go swimming with friends, can frequently create the pressure to spend beyond their immediate capacity. Debt is therefore a continual, on-going possibility and a source of great worry. Several single parent respondents were currently or had recently been badly in debt.

‘I’ve been in debt and it’s such a worry as to how you’re going to get out of the situation... You can’t afford to live on the benefit. if you’re on benefits if you’re not working, you can’t really afford to live on that amount of money, so it’s easy to get into debt I think.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban).

Some single parent children, most notably primary school children, appear happy and content with their financial situation, although to a certain extent they are often being buffered against the possibility of any impacts of poverty by other family members giving financial support to their parent. In tandem, these children's contentment is likely to be linked with low financial expectations. During the course of the research interviews, single parent children were asked what difference it would make to their lives if they had more money and interestingly most had quite modest ambitions for the extra money, in general wanting to use the money to lead a more 'normal' life and do 'normal things.' In this respect, younger children want to have more toys and older children want to be able to afford to go out regularly with their friends, particularly shopping. Ellie said with extra household money she could get paid for her caring responsibilities which would ease the burden, and she could go clothes shopping more frequently.

'If we had more money I'd be able to do more things...just going out and clothes and shopping. Normal teenage stuff. Be OK about looking after my brothers and sisters more because I'd be getting paid.' (Ellie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

4.2.2. Approaches used by children to constrain the effects of poverty

The majority of single parent children employ ways of managing their money so that they do not suffer so much from poverty. Some children have developed specific tactics for negotiating with their parent for money when they want something, for instance letting their parent know a good period in advance before a planned school trip in order that there is time to save up the required money. Leon said he recognised his mother could not instantaneously give him money for something he wanted, but needed time to save the finances necessary.

'I can't go like this to my mum, can I have this and can I have that? Because we have to save our money. We're doing well, but sometimes we have to save up our money for stuff so I can't get stuff on the spot.' (Leon, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

Many single parent children also significantly temper their financial expectations and requests to their parent for money. They, like Ellie, are often sensitive and alert to opportune times to make any requests, judging when they are least likely to cause upset or arguments with their parent. *'I sometimes ask, but other times I just leave it as she'll just say no she hasn't got the money. Sometimes they'll be arguments.'* (Ellie, girl,

single parent child, 16 years, rural). Equally some older children are adept at using demands for money as an emotional tool, recognising they have the ability to make their single parent feel guilty about not satisfying their needs. A common device in this respect is to claim that all their friends have something and they are the only child missing out.

Several single parent children like Gill mentioned accessing additional funds by getting payment for doing jobs around the home, such as cleaning and tidying up. *'I do the washing up, I sometimes mop the floor, sweep up and then help mum tidy our sister's room up as well. Sometimes I get paid, it depends how much I do. If I do a lot I get paid, if I only do a little bit I don't.'* (Gill, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban). Some children said they are able to persuade their relatives to give them money on certain occasions, or do specific chores for their relatives which earn them money. For example, Thomas said he finds it impossible to get the money from his parent to go swimming each week with his friends, and therefore does his grandmother's shopping to earn the necessary funding. And when Jason was asked by the researcher what he would do if he wanted something, he said he makes direct and successful requests to his aunt.

'The only time I get money is I get a £1 each time I go to my nans so I do her shopping for her and it can afford me a swim as I like swimming.' (Thomas, boy, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

'My aunty, she normally gives me anything I want, normally.' (Jason, boy, single parent child, 10 years, urban)

Having a part-time job is a popular and often sought after means to access additional money amongst older children. Young people who have such jobs are generally very positive about the experience, claiming it makes them feel more independent in that they rely less on their parent for money, and they are able to socialise with friends more frequently. There were also some negative comments though, relating to unfair treatment by employers in terms of amounts paid per hour and time off allowed for being ill. The jobs concerned were usually paper rounds, and washing up or waitressing in restaurants. However, few young people said they have a part-time job. There were frequent complaints made about how difficult it is to get a part-time job either because there are none available in the area or they are rejected by employers for being too young or inappropriate for the job concerned.

4.2.3. Children's exclusion from friendships

Poverty can have a significant impact on many single parent children's capacity to make and sustain friendships and in turn can directly contribute to their social exclusion. Teenage children especially, often face exclusion from their friends because their single parent has been unable to afford to buy them the right look, labels and brands in what they wear. Such products define the identity of each friendship group and not having the money to share this identity constrains a teenager's social acceptance and sense of belonging. The material assets in themselves may give limited reward, the emotional satisfaction comes more from having the same as their friends so they can feel part of the group. For example, Leah described how she had been given a reward of a reduced price school prom ticket by her tutor for good behaviour, but did not want to go since she did not have a fashionable dress to wear and worried she would be teased by her friends for that.

'Sometimes our tutor will reward us for getting good event logs like taking us to breakfast in school or money off tickets for a prom. But I didn't go to that as it's £10 and you had to buy a dress and everything. I didn't go as I never had anything to wear.' (Leah, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

Single parent children can equally experience exclusion because they have insufficient money to share the activities their friends are doing, having to forgo trips such as to the cinema or bowling because they do not have the necessary money for the entrance fee and transport. Transport costs are especially problematic for many of the single parent children living in rural areas. Compounding children's sense of exclusion is that their friends usually fail to accommodate their needs by agreeing to do an alternative 'free' activity, and as Katie has found, simply go without them.

'Sometimes my friends go to the cinema and stuff and I haven't got enough money to go so they just go without me. I can't go so I have to stay at home.'
(Katie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Social exclusion of single parent children may also result from their parents not being able to afford school trips and out of school activities. Some children explained they would not mind missing school trips if their friends also stayed behind, but like Elizabeth, feel they are really missing out when friends are able to go and they are not. The length of certain school trips can also mean an absence from friends for long

periods of up to a week. During this time not only are children being excluded from enjoying the trip itself with their friends, they also have no one to socialise with at home and can be left feeling very isolated and bored.

‘The money my mum earns isn’t that much amount. So every time we go somewhere like if there’s a school trip at school, most people go there, like school camp, and we can’t afford it and I can’t go.’ (Elizabeth, girl, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Some older children, especially girls whose mothers work, can face problems in sustaining friendships because of the pressure from their single parent to take on adult caring roles for younger siblings. Although sometimes keen to help being conscious of their mother’s support needs, there are many occasions when children feel their care work restricts opportunities to be out playing with friends. Girls like Ellie said they would usually prefer to be spending time with their mates rather than caring for brothers and sisters. *‘I have to look after my brothers and sisters. It’s a pain. They’re always misbehaving and getting into trouble. I look after them, bath them, take them to school...I’d rather hang around with my mates.’* (Ellie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural). Furthermore, the experience of undertaking a parenting role can lead some young people to develop a more adult persona than their age would suggest, resulting in the child having problems forging healthy child relationships. For example, Abigail described how from an early age she has taken on a caring role for her brother which makes her feel quite grown up. She thinks this is why she prefers talking with adults and has no real friends amongst her peers.

‘It’s a lot easier to talk to adults as I can relate more. It think it’s because, I know this will sound funny, but I’ve had to be strong growing up, trying to look after people, I’ve just had to be. Like my brother. I’ve kind of adopted that role.’ (Abigail, girl, single parent child, 12 years, rural)

4.2.4. Children’s and parents’ views and experiences of current government policies

Single parent children generally believe they are worse off financially than children who live with two parents. Younger children feel that families with two parents have additional money compared to their own family, although they make no link between this situation and government policy. Older children frequently thought government policy directly to blame for both their family’s financial predicament and two-parent families enjoying more money. They often put forward substantive arguments as to why

their single parent's financial circumstances are unfair, and their parent should pay less tax or receive more benefits to compensate for the fact there is only one, not two parents. These feelings are well illustrated by the following quote from Elizabeth.

'It's just not fair that lone parents don't get enough money as they have to pay for food, everything for schools and equipment. Anything they have to buy they have to get. They have to save for ages before they can buy anything.' (Elizabeth, girl, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Whilst the views of children are linked to their own learned comparative experiences, they are also likely to be influenced by the feelings of their single parents. Single parents were vociferous in their complaints against government policy, particularly the seemingly perverse incentives in relation to the government's welfare to work policy. Many feel that instead of encouraging them into the labour market the government is penalising them by restricting the number of hours it is possible to work to be able to stay on benefits, in particular through the trade-off they have to make in relation to the child-care element of their benefits. Several single parents think it impossible to work unless they have financial support for child-care because it is so difficult and expensive to access. One respondent said she is only able to work full-time without government child-care support because her mother provides child-care for free.

'If I didn't have my mum I wouldn't be able to work. That is the choice. My mum means I can work because I wouldn't be able to afford the childcare.' (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Another irritant is the unhelpful attitude of staff in some government agencies who instead of making single parent's lives easier by simplifying and explaining the government's policy on work and tax credits, are often thought to add to the obfuscation and confusion. In several cases, single parents blame their current financial difficulties on the mistakes and insensitivity of Revenue and Customs staff which has left them struggling to repay overpaid tax credit. Some single parents think the government system is so complicated, staff themselves do not understand how all the elements work and it was strongly mooted the system be simplified, so staff can provide more helpful and accurate personal advice and support.

'The whole confusion about tax credits is so real and such a problem. The whole system should be more straightforward for people to be able to get one-to-one

support and sit down and assess everyone's situation.' (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

4.2.5. Professionals recognise single parents often face considerable financial constraints

Professionals recognise that the financial difficulties faced by single parents can directly impact on the lives of children. They have distressed single parent child clients due to upsetting school experiences resulting from the family's financial problems. For example, children given detentions because they do not have the full and correct PE kit as the parent has not been able to afford a replacement shirt, or children being bullied by friends and peers for wearing the 'wrong' clothes since their parent can only afford to shop at discount stores.

Professionals are also aware that many single parents work child-unfriendly hours in order to boost the family income. This means child clients are sometimes spending long periods on their own at home, or unsupervised on the streets, while their parent works. It also creates problems for professionals who often struggle to find opportune times to meet and discuss a child's problems with their single parent. Additionally, professionals can face problems trying to access single parents due to the parents' financial difficulties. Professionals said they often lack information on where single parents are currently living as they tend to be involved in more house moves than average, or are unable to contact single parents by mobile phone because of phone credits having run out.

'Sometimes the single mums that I have got, their mobile is more likely to change or they run out of credit for a long period of time and you can't get hold of them.'
(Female, professional, urban)

4.2.6. Summary

Children's Voices

- Single parent children, especially those in secondary school, have a high level of perceptivity and understanding about their family's financial position. Many are cognisant of 'being poor'.
- Most concerning for many teenagers is facing the constant worry whether they will have enough money to be able to afford to go out with their friends.

- They also mention being relatively poor in relation to their peers on the basis of enjoying less frequent family days out and less regular holidays.
- Comparatively poor home environments can make single parent children reluctant to reciprocate with invitations to stay at their own house after sleepovers shared at friend's houses.
- Poverty can have a significant impact on many single parent children's capacity to make and sustain friendships and in turn can directly contribute to their social exclusion.
- Teenage children especially, often face exclusion from their friends because their single parent has been unable to afford to buy them the right look, labels and brands in what they wear. Such products define the identity of each friendship group and not having the money to share this identity constrains a teenager's social acceptance and sense of belonging.
- Children can equally experience exclusion because they have insufficient money to share the activities their friends are doing, having to forgo trips such as to the cinema or bowling because they do not have the necessary money for the entrance fee and transport.
- Some single parent children, most notably primary school children, appear happy and comfortable with their financial situation, although to a certain extent they are often being buffered against any impacts of poverty by other family members giving financial support to their parent. In tandem, these children's contentment is likely to be linked with low financial expectations.
- Children have quite modest ambitions when asked what they would do if their family were given extra money, in general wanting to just live a more 'normal' life like other children.
- They employ specific strategies in an attempt to avoid the worst repercussions of poverty.
- Having a part-time job is a popular and sought-after means to increase personal funds amongst older children. However, few said they had been able to find such work and it seems many teenagers are constrained by their poor environments, with few part-time job vacancies being available in the areas they live.
- Some older children, especially girls, are caring for siblings whilst their parent works which restricts their capacity to play and sustain friendships.

- Single parent children generally believe they are worse off financially than children who live with two parents.
- Older children frequently think government policy directly to blame for both their family's financial predicament and two-parent families enjoying more money.

Single Parent Voices

- Single parents are vociferous in their complaints against government policy, particularly the seemingly perverse incentives in relation to the government's welfare to work policy.
- Many feel that instead of encouraging them into the labour market the government is penalising them by restricting the number of hours it is possible to work to be able to stay on benefits, in particular through the trade-off they have to make in relation to the child-care element of their benefits.

4.3. Time Issues Faced by Single Parent Families

4.3.1. Impact of parents' time poverty on family together time

Whilst there are some single parent children, especially younger children, who talk about spending extensive quality time with their parent, older children are aware of suffering the consequences of their single parent's time poverty. Many children whose single parent works or studies, complain of lack of quality time together. For example, Katie explained she was often miserable because her single parent father is usually too busy working to spend time going out with her and so she spends far more time with her friends.

'I'd like to spend more time with him and go out places, but he's really too busy all the time so sometimes I get a bit upset because we don't spend much time together. I come home from school and my dad has to go off to work straight away then I have an empty house to myself and I get upset, so that's why I spend more time with friends.' (Katie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Some older children can spend long periods at home on their own while their single parent works, leading to feelings of boredom and loneliness. Confined to their home they tend to feel cut off from others in the world around them, deprived of stimulation and companionship and with only the TV or if more fortunate, the computer for entertainment. Although some children enjoy just 'chilling out' doing nothing for a while, such a sedentary and solo existence can become frustrating and miserable if it continues for too long. Shannon, living on her own with her mother, described how boring and lonely she feels having the house to herself each evening after school till her mother comes home from work several hours later. She also believes that spending so much time alone she lacks the capacity to interact effectively with other people.

'Lonely. You don't have much social skills, you don't know how to act around some people. I feel lonely when I'm at home, just me and the TV...Bored I have no life.' (Shannon, girl, single parent child, 16 years, urban)

4.3.2. Impact of parents' time poverty on talking time with children

Many older children whose single parent works or studies also complain about how their parent's time poverty restricts the opportunities they have to talk. They claim their single parent is frequently not available to talk about things that are important to them, being too tired and moody after work, too busy with chores around the home or looking after siblings, or simply not at home and out working. This can sometimes have quite serious emotional repercussions making children feel neglected, angry and frustrated. Some children get an impression their parent is not interested in them, does not love them enough or is pushing them out of their life. Leah for example, said her mother spent most time when not studying, looking after her younger brother and she feels like an 'outcast' in the family. When she wants to talk, her mother is usually pre-occupied with other things and ignores her which usually results in her shouting at her mother. A teenage boy mentioned he is often miserable because his mother has no time to talk.

'Sometimes I want to tell my mum...I get annoyed and sometimes wound up about it as well. I feel really stressed out, sometimes I get bit angry and I know I shouldn't.' (Leah, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

'She's got no time for me.' (Secondary school boy, single parent child group, urban)

Children recognise the value and benefits of talking and believe that more time doing so with their single parent would lead to a stronger, more positive relationship between them. They suggest there would be less arguing and misunderstanding, and a reduction in their feelings of anger and irritation. Single parents concur with this view being conscious that the child/parent relationship can suffer as a consequence of their lack of time to provide support and give attention to their children.

'It just ends up the relationship really suffers. You know when you don't chat so much, you're less connected and then it ends up, it just becomes very, very negative. ..The sort of one to one time that is really important.' (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban)

At the same time single parents recognise that faced with the demands of juggling work and home care responsibilities, they will be unable to give more time to the support of their children, especially their older children. This puts more emotional burden on their already overloaded shoulders as they feel society will blame them, if through lack of

regular interaction and attention time with their teenage children, the children end up getting into trouble at school or out on the streets.

‘I find the guilt quite difficult...I wish I didn’t have to work a lot of the time so I could be there more for them. It is a very difficult balance.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Interestingly, children and parents from two-parent families recognise the problems single parents face in finding sufficient time to spend with their teenage children. Two-parent children thought that since the single parent is doing all the parental jobs including going out to work, children would find it hard to talk with that parent. And parents from two-parent families themselves feel they do not give enough attention to their children despite there being two parents to share family responsibilities and judge it must be significantly harder for single parents.

4.3.3. Professionals aware of the consequential problems for children of their single parent’s time-poverty

Professionals are also cognisant of the negative repercussions of single parents having insufficient time and attention to give to their children. They mention a variety of detrimental consequences including poor school behaviour and school exclusions which are felt harder to resolve when single parents lack the time to give support and attention to the child concerned. They believe that single parents generally have less available time than parents from two-parent families to help with homework or show interest and encouragement in what their children are doing at school. Temporary exclusions are thought to put particular pressure on a working single parent since the child will be on its own at home unless the parent is able to take time off work. Professionals also feel it is easier for parents in two-parent families to find the time to provide the support necessary to encourage an excluded teenage child to return to school life with the right frame of mind and behaviour attitude.

‘I’ve worked with children from two-parent families who have been excluded, but they still have that support, that home life where they were continued to be encouraged, you’ve got to do this. In that situation it’s easier, the parent is more accessible and has more time for you than maybe a parent who is on their own.’ (Female, professional, urban)

4.3.4. Summary

Children's Voices

- Significantly, older children are aware of suffering the consequences of their single parent's time poverty. Many children whose single parent works or studies, complain of lack of quality family time together, and restricted opportunities to talk with their parent about things which are important to them.
- This can sometimes have quite serious emotional repercussions making the children feel neglected, angry and frustrated.
- It also means children end up spending a greater amount of time with and under the influence of their friends, than they do with their single parent.
- Some children, especially older girls, have had to take on more family care and support work to compensate for their parent spending longer hours away from home, which in turn can negatively affect their school work and attendance.
- Other children complain of being bored or lonely due to more time being spent at home on their own whilst their parent works.

Single Parent Voices

- Time poverty is an issue of key importance for many single parents. Faced with the demands of juggling work and home care responsibilities, many single parents believe they are unable to give sufficient time to the support of their children, especially their older children.
- This puts more emotional burden on their already overloaded shoulders as they feel that society will blame them if, through lack of regular interaction and attention time with their teenage children, the children end up getting into trouble at school or out on the streets.

Education Support Professionals

- Professionals also recognise the negative repercussions of single parents having insufficient time and attention to give to their children. They mention a variety of detrimental consequences including poor school behaviour and school exclusions, which are felt harder to resolve when single parents lack the time to give support and attention to the child concerned.

4.4. Community Relations of Children from Single Parent Families

4.4.1. Friends play a key role in the majority of children's lives

Friends provide a fundamental source of enjoyment and emotional support for children from single parent families. Being in the presence of friends creates a sense of inclusion and well-being. Friends are described as people you can talk with about your true feelings and share confidences with. Trust and mutual understanding are key friendship ingredients. For some single parent children like Ellie, these are especially important aspects of friendship since they can be sharing very personal and intimate stories about problems at home and do not want everyone in their class to know. *'If you tell your friends about what's going on at home like if you can trust them, you don't want them to tell everyone else what's going on at home.'* (Ellie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural). Friends also provide feelings of safety and security for older children in relation to other teenagers both in and outside school. They can act as a protective barrier against bullies and the threat of attack from other teenage gangs and groups.

Concomitant with these positive feelings about friends is evident widespread worry about fitting in with and being part of a friendship group. Many young people said they often had concerns about their friends' behaviour towards them and what their friends' views were about them. It can be a source of great angst and upset when relationships break down, especially amongst girls. This can often occur because a friend has broken what are clearly specific and important friendship rules. Several girls mentioned being particularly upset at school by supposed friends taking the side of peers against them in arguments or disputes, or saying nasty and unpleasant things about them to others behind their back. This is seen as a great betrayal and cause for the friendship to be terminated.

4.4.2. Activities with friends are a central facet of children's lifestyles

Activities with friends tend to dominate the lifestyles of single parent children. They are a focal point of out-of-school life. Young children's friendships tend to be localised, often being the same friendship groups from school and the local neighbourhood. Playing together in the 'yard' (school playground) or on the streets is a core facet of their evenings and out-of-school time.

Many children, especially older ones, are spending far more time with their friends than with their parent and family. Friendship activities can also offer some teenagers escapism from the boredom or pressures of school and home. They enjoy just being with friends and can spend long periods simply chatting and loitering around; not doing anything in particular, but taking amusement from each other and passers by. Consequently for older children, peer pressure can exert a stronger influence than that of their parent on their interests, lifestyle and behaviour. In some situations this influence is beneficial, leading young people to engage in motivating activities and experiences they may not have accessed through their parent, such as sports, music and outdoor hobby interests. However, for other young people peer influence can lead to more negative activities such as smoking, drugs, drinking and fights. For example, Ellie said that she used to drink heavily with friends, especially at weekends, before being given help through the youth project she now belongs to.

‘I was going out and drinking too much with mates.’ (Ellie, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Proximity to friends’ homes is a key determinant of many single parent children’s views about their neighbourhood. Some children, especially those living in rural villages, are critical of where they live, claiming they can feel lonely and cut off because their school friends live a considerable distance away. Regular visits to their friends’ houses are impossible. Conversely, if they live near good friends, young people tend to hold generally positive views about their home environment. For example, Emily recognises that people think the area she lives fairly rough, but she likes it because she is able to play with her friends who live nearby and it makes her feel safe being with them at the park.

‘I like living in --- as in the summer you can play out with friends and you meet loads of people your age. Some people say it’s rough, but it’s only rough if you make troubles. I feel quite safe when I play out with my friends. There’s a park and I have friends and I’m happy with my house.’ (Emily, girl, single parent child, 11 years, urban)

4.4.3 Children's limited capacity to play

Poverty as experienced through poor home environments places restrictions on single parent children's capacity to play. They state that there is a lack of space at home to play and few parks or play areas in the immediate vicinity of where they live. There also appear to be limited opportunities available for organised leisure activities such as youth clubs and leisure facilities. Few young people said they belonged to organised groups such as sea cadets or sports clubs or have the opportunity to go to organised activities such as swimming or ice skating.

As a consequence the social worlds of younger children are fairly constrained, being largely confined to the home, playing with friends in the street or the very local community. Children commonly include in their descriptions of home based play activities, watching TV and being on the computer. After-school clubs are often mentioned as play venues with some recognition of how they can help a parent in providing care support for children. Relatives and friends appear integral to play activities, with several young children mentioning the range of children they have contact with and play with locally.

'When I'm not at school I like to play. I play with my toys, on the computer and now we have a garden I play in the garden...I go places with my mum, we visit places, parks, we went to one with animals...I go with my Uncle Keith and Cousin Stuart and play with his electric plane.' (Jon, boy, single parent child, 6 years, rural)

Many of the older children involved in the research are highly critical of the absence of leisure activities available in their area. They are strongly of the view that there is very little to do or amuse them. Boredom is a common complaint. Teenage boys in particular bemoan the lack of youth centres and sports clubs. If there are such venues, they tend to be located at a distance from where they live, and transport and entrance fees are judged too expensive for their means. For example, one teenage boy living in a rural town, who likes diving, complained that he has to pay to take the bus to the nearest swimming centre with a diving pool which restricts the occasions he can afford to visit. Young people are also pessimistic as to whether any such facilities will ever get built in their home area.

‘There ain’t nothing to do round here. A sports centre would be good, swimming pool, football, badminton. But let’s be realistic it ain’t going to happen.’ (Secondary school boy, single parent child group, urban)

Safety on the streets is a common source of worry and complaint for older children. In urban areas and rural towns many teenagers mention not feeling safe out on the streets around their homes in the evening. They are variously worried about the behaviour of youth gangs, alcoholics and drug addicts. These concerns mean they are often wary of walking far to access any play facilities such as cinema, swimming pools or youth centres, further adding to their irritation that such facilities tend not to be available locally. Asked what changes would best help improve their lives, several young people said they want more police on the streets so they can feel safer walking about.

‘Need more police. The area is terrible, all alcoholics. Don’t feel safe. More police so we could feel safer and walk around. It’s just a ghetto out there.’ (Secondary school boy, single parent child group, urban)

As a consequence of these environmental problems, a lot of play for older children as Gill describes, simply involves hanging around with friends in the street near to where they live, similar to their younger counterparts. Many teenagers also spend long periods engaged in sedentary activities at home, watching TV or social networking via the Internet. In this respect, children with access to MSN are much envied by those children whose parents cannot afford a computer.

‘I see friends from the school in the evenings. Just chatting and hanging around basically.’ (Gill, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

4.4.4. Summary

Children's Voices

- Friends provide a fundamental source of enjoyment and emotional support for single parent children and activities with friends dominate their lifestyles. Many children, especially older ones, are spending far more time with friends than with their single parent and family.
- Peer pressure can exert a stronger influence than that of their single parent on children's interests, lifestyle and behaviour.
- Proximity to friends' homes directly influences children's views about their neighbourhood. Those living close to friends hold generally positive views about their local area, even if it is a 'rough' area, whilst those in rural villages living far from school friends can feel quite lonely.
- Poor home environments place restrictions on many children's capacity to play. They feel there is a lack of space at home to play and few play areas in the vicinity of where they live.
- There are also limited opportunities for organised leisure activities with an absence of local youth clubs and leisure facilities.
- Safety on the streets is a worry and concern for some older children, curtailing their desire to walk far to access play facilities beyond their local area.
- As a consequence, the social worlds of children can be fairly constrained, mainly confined to their home or hanging around playing in the street.

4.5. Health Issues Faced by Children from Single Parent Families

4.5.1. Majority of children consider themselves healthy

Asked whether they were 'healthy', the majority of single parent children described themselves as such. Many children also elaborated in some detail as to why they considered themselves healthy, explaining the good things they eat, how active they are and their prowess at PE and other physical activities. In general young people have high levels of awareness as to what are the key ingredients of a healthy lifestyle. They appear, like Emily, well informed in terms of the benefits of a good diet and the make-up of such a diet, especially the value of eating 'five a day'. They are also conscious of the need to exercise regularly if they are to sustain their health.

'I eat five a day and I'm the right height. I'm not too skinny and not too fat and I do activities and get on well with PE at school so I think I'm healthy.' (Emily, girl, single parent child, 11 years, urban)

A minority of young people said they experienced specific health problems, the most common being asthma, especially amongst older children. In most cases however, the child felt the ailment is being effectively controlled through medication.

4.5.2. But evidence of negative health impacts linked to poverty

Despite considering themselves healthy and their awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, it is clear from the research findings that poverty does affect the health of some single parent children. Several young people referenced how the costs associated with living healthily limits their capacity to be healthy. For example, a teenage girl described how her single parent mother is now forced to buy cheaper, less healthy food and can no longer buy anything 'organic' because they do not have enough money. And a boy from a single parent family mentioned how keen he is to do out-of-school sports, especially football, but that his mother cannot afford the cost involved for him to join a club. Some single parents are also voluble in their complaints as to the expense of enabling their children to live more healthily. They mention wanting to buy better quality food or take their child to extra-curriculum sports activities, but financial constraints prevent them doing so.

‘Promote health that’s what the policies are and that’s what it’s telling us that we need to be thinking for our kids. But how can you do it if you don’t have the funds and the finances to do it? Kick boxing they used to go to, but that’s like four, five quid and everything costs.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Further evidence of health problems linked to poverty came from children’s descriptions about feeling tired or experiencing a lack of stamina at school. This is especially apparent amongst a number of secondary school children whose parents have no car and who travel long distances to rural schools. Some of these children complain that since bus times are not linked to school start times they arrive at school long before lessons start, and this is after getting up early to catch the bus. Others like Elizabeth, mention long walks to school of up to an hour, being another cause of tiredness.

‘I have to walk to school, all the way to R---, about half an hour or 40 minutes. I don’t like to go that far, you get tired after a while and if you have PE on the same day then it’s quite hard when you get back as you have to walk back as well.’ (Elizabeth, girl, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

The poor standard of housing lived in by some single parent families and the limitations of the home environment can also have a negative effect on young people’s health. Leisure activities for many single parent children are more indoors than outdoors, and passive rather than active as a consequence of a lack of available play and leisure facilities in the vicinity of their homes. A common complaint amongst young people, as articulated by Shannon, is that there are no parks near where they live for them to hang out and play with their friends. Similarly teenagers, especially boys, say they are keen to engage in active pursuits such as cycling, swimming and skateboarding, and bemoan the absence of such facilities in their local area.

‘I don’t really like this area. There’s nothing to do at all. In posh areas they’ve got like nice parks. If I lived in another area, I don’t know, I don’t really go out around here.’ (Shannon, girl, single parent child, 16 years, urban)

Children’s criticisms on this issue are echoed by many single parents. Furthermore, several single parents say that because of safety fears they are reluctant to allow their teenage children out onto the local estate for exercise or to play in areas in close proximity to where they live. They worry about their children hanging out with ‘the wrong sort’ and getting into problems with the police through being associated with troublemakers. *‘He can ride a bike, but he can’t go anywhere on it, the places aren’t*

safe. They haven't even got like a place for skateboarding.' (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

There were also a few mentions by single parent children of poor housing conditions having a detrimental health effect, especially poor sleeping arrangements making sleeping difficult for children. For example, two or three children having to share a bedroom, children sharing beds, and cold rooms due to an absence of central heating.

4.5.3. Summary

Children's voices

- Despite considering themselves healthy and having good awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, poverty negatively impinges on the health of some single parent children.
- Lack of play and leisure facilities, such as parks and sports centres in the local vicinity, means that children's leisure activities are often more indoors than outdoors, and passive rather than active.
- Restricted space in the home can further exacerbate the constraints on children's capacity to play, whilst poor bedroom conditions make sleeping difficult for some children.
- Health problems linked to poverty are also evidenced from children's descriptions about feeling tired or experiencing a lack of stamina at school. This is especially apparent amongst secondary school children whose single parents have no car and who walk long distances to rural schools.

Single Parent Voices

- The costs associated with healthy eating can limit the capacity to be healthy in that some single parents are forced to buy cheaper, less healthy and non-organic food for their children or are unable to afford for their children to benefit from out-of-school sports activities.
- The poor standard of housing lived in by several single parent families, and the limitations of the home environment, can have a convergent negative effect on some children's health.

4.6. School Life of Children from Single Parent Families

4.6.1. Children's views about school

Younger single parent children almost unanimously like school and there are also some older children who regard school as a positive and enjoyable place. Their appreciation stems from the fact school is where they can spend time with their friends. They may often miss being at school as it means being away from their friends. For some older children, being in the safe and secure company of their friends at school has the added advantage of escapism from problems and tensions at home.

'It's really good.' (Gemma, girl, single parent child, 9 years, urban)

'I like school. You meet your friends there. It's a nice social place.' (Donald, boy, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Conversely other children, predominantly attending secondary schools, are generally negative about school life especially the perceived unfairness of teachers' behaviour management. There are also some young people who dislike the whole teaching experience. Teenage boys in particular claim there is too much written work; their preference is for more practical exercises. They also think testing is too frequent. Several children mention struggling to understand certain lessons, especially maths and science and want more individual help and attention.

Some teenagers diminish the general quality of their school, feeling many aspects of it are 'crap' because it is in a poor area. They sense there is some kind of interrelationship between the many negative features of their school. Since the school is in a deprived area they think there are low expectations of the pupils. In turn, this is thought to attract poor quality teachers who then have trouble preventing students' disruptive behaviour in the class, making learning difficult. Additionally, old and decaying buildings and facilities are believed to give children low pride in their school, making them more likely to want to cause damage. The children who hold these views share a strong sense of disadvantage through attending the type of school they do.

'School is so beaten down and old and ugly and dirty. Everything's broken. If it's ugly you're going to trash it even more as you don't like it. People make holes in the walls, write everywhere, break stuff, smash stuff, burn stuff. They don't care.' (Shannon, girl, single parent child, 16 years, urban)

4.6.2. School Life and Single Parenthood

Being a single parent child is thought not unusual and therefore not a cause for interest or response amongst other children. Furthermore, many single parent children believe the majority of people in their school, pupils and teachers, are unaware they are from a single parent family and are generally pleased this is the case. Like Erin they are appreciative that everyone in the school is treated similarly and equitably, irrespective of their family circumstances.

‘They don’t really know if we are or not (from a single parent family). Well my tutor does, but she doesn’t treat me differently at all. We are all like treated the same which is really good.’ (Erin, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

Teachers and professionals comment on the fact that the schools they are involved with have children from such a diverse range of family backgrounds, ethnic, religious and social, that single parenthood virtually goes unnoticed. Most said they could not think of any situations at school where they had personally observed, or children had complained to them of bullying because of a single parent family background. However, the research elicited that single parent children may be victims of bullying because their family’s circumstances have made them more emotionally vulnerable. For example, Isabel described how she had been bullied by another girl at school when feeling particularly sensitive during the period her parents were divorcing. She still feels upset that the bully had persuaded her to misbehave at school when she was reluctant to do so.

‘I was bullied for about a year. It was in the middle of the time when mum and dad were splitting up. I’m quite weak at arguing, and the person bullying me was manipulating me and making me do things I didn’t want to.’ (Isabel, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Single parent children did not express any concern about how ‘family’ is presented in school texts or talked about in the classroom. This finding is replicated amongst teachers, parents and professionals, who believe there has been a step-change in recent years to ensure there is no discrimination in the way families are written about in contemporary school texts and talked about in the classroom. Only if schools are forced to use old text books due to lack of finances did teachers and professionals think

children likely to encounter any prejudicial stereotypes involving idealised two-parent families. It was recognised that such references could make single parent children feel uncomfortable.

‘There is more awareness amongst staff that all these young people don’t come from a nuclear family or with two parents. But some of the literature can be quite old, old maths books, and they’re still using it and I’m thinking that might make a young person feel awkward, all these references to mum and dad.’ (Male, professional, urban)

4.6.3. The impacts of poverty on children’s school experiences

Poverty clearly has a negative effect on the school experiences of several single parent children. Children may not be bullied specifically for being from a single parent family, but they can be bullied because their family’s poverty results in them wearing the ‘wrong’ style and brand of clothes and trainers, which can lead to them feeling even more socially excluded. Professionals are aware that bullying linked to children’s ‘look’ is a problem for several of their single parent clients although the professionals are not always aware of a direct link between single parenthood and poverty.

‘Teenagers nowadays are really conscious of labels and having the right stuff...and I know some of my young people feel bullied and teased at school because they feel they haven’t got the latest gear or whatever.’ (Female, professional, urban)

Poverty of resources at home can also impact on single parent children’s school performance. The poor home environment of some children means they can find it difficult to locate a quiet space to do homework. For example, Awale said his home was too small to have a table on which he could write and since he had consistently failed to do the homework set for him by teachers, he is now required to attend a homework club after school where his work is supervised. *‘We don’t have enough space to have a table so we can all write on it. I stay at school. I do it (homework) at school.’* (Awale, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban).

Temporary housing provision and frequent house moves, reflective of their family’s financial poverty, are a fact of life for several single parent children. Gemma for example, had moved only a couple of weeks previous to being interviewed from a small village just outside the town where she now lives, and said of the move, *‘Mum went to*

court and these people told us we had to leave.' (Gemma, girl, 9 years, single parent child, urban). Other children described moves that were from only one street to the next. Such recurrent changes in home accommodation substantiates the view of some professionals that single parent children tend to have more 'chaotic' home lives, resulting in disorganisation in the children's school lives.

Time poverty as a result of juggling work and care can inhibit the capacity of some single parents to give time and attention to their children's school behaviour and achievement. These single parents recognise the problems this may be storing up for their children in future, but feel they have no capacity to change their work/life balance. Some single parents may also struggle to find the time to help with homework, especially their older children, which can generate further angst and guilt.

'I feel really, really guilty. I do ask them (about homework), but it's always a kind of just checking have you done your homework? I don't have time to sit. My time with the girls is very sparse at the minute as there's a lot of work on.' (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Additionally, several single parents believe they are putting their teenage children at an educational disadvantage by not having the financial resources to fund extra-curriculum tuition, seen as increasingly the norm for children from wealthier families. To ameliorate the problem they suggest the government make child educational grants available for which single parents could apply to fund tuition classes for subjects such as maths, music and dance.

'If you can't afford it you feel terribly guilty. Middle class families with two parents working afford it, they're all paying for children to have extra tuition so they've got an unfair advantage.' (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban)

4.6.4. School support mechanisms for learning and behaviour generally appreciated

Younger children say they are pleased their schools have good anti-bullying policies to prevent any bad behaviour. Older children are more expressive of their appreciation for a range of different support mechanisms their secondary schools have put in place to encourage learning and good behaviour, particularly special learning units, learning mentors, tutor groups, and reward schemes. Special learning units are liked as places where children can go if they have problems in class or are upset about something. It

means they can be away from the class pressures, but still be at school. For example, Isabel said she had been sent to her school's special unit after her father had died and how it had been nice and peaceful working there for a few weeks when she was feeling miserable.

'It was like a separate classroom. I could do all my work in there because I was really upset. It was quite nice there, they kind of helped you out... There were a few people there but not many.' (Isabel, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Learning mentors are appreciated because they provide one-to-one teaching found helpful by children struggling to keep up in class. Favourable comments were also made about having a learning mentor to assist with doing homework. Tutor groups are praised because they involve relatively small groups of students, making it easier to talk about any personal problems and difficulties, and be listened to properly. Children such as Ali, appreciate having a particular person in the school that they know they can always approach to talk in private and confidence about any issues troubling them.

'My learning tutor he knows most of my problems. He understands me and listens to me. If I tell him something he just keeps it to himself and tries to find a way to help me out.' (Ali, boy, single parent child, 13 years, urban)

Some older children have had experience of reward schemes introduced in their secondary school to encourage students to work harder and gain better results. They are generally positive about such schemes in that their efforts were rewarded even if they were not coming top in class. They got something meaningful to show they were trying their best, although their best might not make them one of the cleverest.

4.6.5. Single parents are generally positive about their relationship with schools

Most single parents claim to have positive dealings with the primary and secondary schools attended by their children. They feel schools treat them fairly and equitably and few said they had encountered any discriminatory or prejudicial attitudes. Being a single parent does not appear to be an issue in their relationship with schools. Furthermore, some single parents comment favourably on the manner and behaviour of schools in relation to their handling of family-related problems. They have found teachers to be understanding and supportive and readily accessible for discussions and meetings. For

instance, a single parent mother experiencing child protection issues after the break-up of her marriage claimed the school attended by her two children had been very helpful.

‘The school has been extremely helpful. There have been child protection issues. One lives predominantly with his dad and one predominantly with me, but generally they’ve handled it well. When there have been things going on and I’ve needed to see a head teacher they’ve made themselves available.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Some single parents appreciate schools taking a holistic view of the child when there are any problem issues such as detention or truancy. They find it helpful that schools directly involve the parent and consider the wider family context of the child’s situation, not just the behaviour problem itself. One single mother for instance, mentioned her teenage son was often disruptive and unruly in class which had led him to receive a succession of detentions. The problem behaviour had continued, but instead of imposing more stringent punishment, the school had asked her to discuss some of the family background issues, and involved her in trying to seek a solution. As a result, her son is due to start seeing the school counsellor. She respects how the school has taken a constructive rather than penalizing approach to the problem and feels supported by them.

‘Initially it was just sort of he had detentions and things like that and they’re trying to look at the wider things now and wondering where it comes from. And he’s going to have a session with the school counsellor next week so that feels quite good.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban)

4.6.6. However, there is evidence of some institutional lack of awareness amongst teachers relating to communication difficulties experienced by single parents

A minority of single parents do experience problems in their dealings with schools, although these appear only to be with secondary schools. Most problems are linked to communications, especially difficulties accessing teachers or letters home being inappropriately addressed. A number of single parents mention how problematic it can be trying to make the time to attend parent evenings or parent events at their children’s school, even if given advance warning of dates and times. Especially difficult are felt to be ad-hoc meetings arranged by the school to discuss specific issues involving their child, since these are usually slotted in during school times. Atypical working times and looking after very young children also frequently contribute to single parents’ lack of

availability. This is an issue commented on by professionals, who feel teachers often fail to take into account single parent needs in relation to meeting times.

‘I don’t think I get treated differently, but I think I become less accessible because there’s so much I have to do. When they have like open evenings I can’t always attend, I have other things to do. I think I’m a lot less accessible to the school.’
(Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Communications between school and home can sometimes be a problem. Some single parents commented on the inappropriate addressing of letters: always to ‘Mr and Mrs’, or referencing both mother and father. This problem can also directly affect single parent children with several mentioning being upset by teachers giving them letters addressed to their ‘mum and dad’ or making an announcement in class that children have to ask their ‘mum and dad’ to sign something. Another difficulty stems from children having responsibility for taking letters home from school to their parent. In situations where a child lives between two homes with two parents, for example, only one parent might get the information concerned.

‘The only problems I find with the school, sometimes they forget that the kids have got a mother and a father that are separate and they don’t provide us with enough information. They’ll send one letter home and whoever the kids are staying with that night gets the letter.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

Teachers themselves appear unaware of these communication issues believing they make themselves available and accessible to all parents. They do not feel there is a need to use different communication procedures for single parents, other than ensuring both parents in cases of shared parental responsibility get any school reports, letters etc. Furthermore, teachers claim their schools put a focus on effective communications with parents and on involving them with the school, since this is judged important to help children’s progress. They recounted various efforts their schools are making to build closer relationships with parents. For example, one primary school recently funded the Deputy Head Teacher and Chair of Governors to attend a teaching course on ‘positive parenting’ and this initiative is now being delivered to parents within the school. And one of the secondary schools holds ‘make the grade evenings’ for parents of children in Year 11, for the school to talk about the children’s General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams and what is required for them to do well. The school employs

two Parent Co-ordinators who ensure consistent, on-going contact with all parents, and enable parents to be as involved as much as they want in their children's learning.

The majority of teachers feel there is little discernible difference between single parents and parents from two-parent families in the extent to which they engage and communicate with the school. Of considerable more influence in affecting a parent's level of involvement, and attendance at parent's meetings, is thought to be the parent's own school experience. Those parents with negative memories of their school days are believed to find it more difficult to positively engage with the school, irrespective of whether they are a single parent or not.

'I couldn't say that single parent families are less likely to engage with the school or come to parent evenings or any of those kind of things. I have no evidence that suggests that.' (Female, secondary school teacher, rural)

4.6.7. Teachers and professionals want to be non-discriminatory, but express some unconscious stigmatisation in their attitudes

Teachers are alert to not wanting to engage in any discriminatory practice in relation to single parent children. There are felt to be no issues, behavioural, social or emotional, that are solely the domain of children from single parent families. They also claim the majority of single parent children have no behaviour or achievement problems and that single parents in general are very competent parents and good role models. Nonetheless several teachers, as well as professionals, seem to hold some stigmatising notions that when single parent children do exhibit difficulties with achievement or behaviour, it is predominantly because of negative factors associated with the child having only one parent. These include the view that the lives of single parent children are usually 'chaotic' which results in organisational problems such as the children being late for the start of school, wearing inappropriate school uniform, forgetting to do homework or to bring in PE kit. Another perception is that single parent boys lack appropriate male role models leading to problems with authority. Teachers from one secondary school noted that only children from single parent families have been permanently excluded from the school and a key contributory cause is thought lack of a good male role model to provide guidance on behaviour.

'Organisation is probably for some kids the biggest impact because we have a number of students who spend time with mum during the week and dad at the

weekend and that doesn't help to get homework done and the right uniform to be brought and that sort of thing.' (Female, secondary school teacher, rural)

There can be a failure to appreciate links between family poverty and the school experiences of single parent children, although primary school teachers are better in this respect, for example offering financial support for school trips. *'Most (issues working with the children of single parents) I come across are financial. A lot of them can end up on free school meals. They have not got the same income.'* (Female, primary school teacher, rural). And some teachers are prepared to consider broader structural factors that might affect single parent children such as their parent's time-poverty, acknowledging that parents from two-parent families are likely to have more time for assisting their child with homework, talking about school issues and helping with any school related problems.

Some professionals, recognising that teachers should be more aware of factors that might affect the school lives of children from single parent families come up with their own suggestions as to how this might be achieved, including giving teachers insights into single parent life through shadowing of support workers or job swaps. They argue that having a more informed picture of the issues faced by some single parent children could greatly improve the effectiveness of teachers' response and handling of children's in-school behaviour although they stress that improved awareness should not lead to labelling and discrimination of single parent children.

'For me it is about having if possible a bit of a happy medium so trying not to label somebody just because of A, B or C. But being aware of the things that might affect them and that you need to take into account.' (Female, professional, urban)

At the same time professionals' own views and policies reflect some ambiguity. On the one hand they perceive normality in single parenthood which underpins a view there are no behavioural or educational issues specific or unique to children from single parent families, and a practice of treating all children the same way. On the other hand, there is a tendency for some professionals to consider single parent families as problematic, focusing their attention on the perceived negative repercussions of children's school performance because of having only one parent. For example, several professionals think problems often arise from single parent children taking on the role of carer and surrogate parent for younger siblings, or from being pressured into providing emotional

support for their single parent, to the extent the parent is quite dependent on them. When in school, the child being released from adult responsibilities is consequently thought to misbehave.

‘Parents just think they’re adults and no longer sort of care for them like they do with the little ones. And it’s really hard for them because they’re really confused. They’re acting sort of adult in some ways and they’re totally needy in most other ways.’ (Female, professional, urban)

4.6.8. Summary

Children's Voices

- Younger single parent children almost unanimously like school and there are also some older children who consider school to be a positive and enjoyable place. Their appreciation stems from the fact that school is where they can spend time with their friends.
- Other children, predominantly attending secondary schools, are generally negative about school life especially the perceived unfairness of teachers' behaviour management.
- Children appreciate many of the support mechanisms for learning and behaviour available in schools. Praises are especially given for those such as special learning units, learning mentors, tutor groups and counselling services which help and support them to talk about and overcome their concerns and worries, since some single parent children can be emotionally burdened by their home pressures.
- Some teenagers diminish the general quality of their school, feeling many aspects of it suffer from being in a poor area.
- Poverty has a negative effect on some children's school experiences. Children may not be bullied specifically for being from a single parent family, but they can be bullied because their family's poverty results in them wearing the 'wrong' style and brand of clothes and trainers.
- Poverty of resources at home can also impact on single parent children's school performance. For example, the poor home environment of some children means it can be difficult to find a quiet space to do homework. For several children in this study, temporary housing provision is a fact of life.

Single Parent Voices

- Time poverty as a result of juggling work and care can inhibit the capacity of some single parents to give time and attention to their children's school behaviour and achievement.
- They may also struggle to find the time to help with homework, especially for their older children.
- Several single parents feel they are putting their teenage children at a disadvantage by not having the financial resources to fund extra-curriculum tuition, seen as increasingly the norm for children from wealthier families.

Teachers/Education Support Professionals

- Teachers are alert to not wanting to engage in any discriminatory practice in relation to single parent children, actively pursuing policies that focus on the child as an individual not its parental background.
- But some teachers, as well as professionals, can hold stigmatising notions that when single parent children do exhibit difficulties with achievement or behaviour, it is predominantly because of negative factors associated with the child having only one parent, including the view their family lives are usually ‘chaotic’ and that they suffer from a lack of appropriate male role models.
- There can be a failure to appreciate links between family poverty and the school experiences of single parent children, although primary school teachers are much better in this respect, for example offering financial support for school trips. Some teachers are prepared to consider broader structural factors that might affect single parent children such as their parent’s time poverty.
- Lack of awareness can result in some teachers inadvertently being discriminatory in the manner in which they communicate with single parent children and their single parents, such as inappropriately addressing letters home or not taking account of single parent’s availability when arranging meetings.
- Teachers need to be made more aware of the way poverty and social exclusion can impact on the school lives of single parent children. Some professionals come up with suggestions to achieve this, such as giving teachers insights into single parent life through shadowing of support workers or job swaps.
- Professionals’ own views and policies reflect ambiguity. They may perceive normality in single parenthood yet some consider single parent families problematic, focusing attention on the perceived negative repercussions of children’s school performance because of having only one resident parent.
- Several professionals believe temporary housing results in chaotic home lives and subsequent disorganisation in the children’s school life.

4.7. Services and Support Received by Single Parent Children

4.7.1. Child psychological and emotional support an important need

Many single parent children, particularly older children, are keen for more counselling and support services which could help them talk about and overcome their concerns and worries, since they can sometimes feel emotionally burdened by home pressures. Ideally they would like to talk to someone independent, with the time and interest to listen to their problems and feelings, and give helpful advice. For example, Abigail explained how much she wanted someone to talk to in order to relieve the anger she sometimes feels about her family. She recognised that bottling up her feelings could cause serious problems as she might vent those feelings on someone else, which she had done recently with a friend.

‘There’s not that many people to talk to...Just get it off your chest. If mum is winding me up, or my brother or my dad. Just talk to someone to relieve it. In most one parent families you haven’t really got anyone to talk to...You can get it off your chest instead of it all bottling up and exploding and you do something you don’t really want to do. I’ve had a go at one of my friends, I just snapped.’
(Abigail, girl, single parent child, 12 years, rural)

Single parent children are generally positive about the support services they have used such as school counsellors, learning mentors and youth workers. They appreciate the support workers’ capacity to listen and understand the issues raised, and the fact that sensible advice is offered without judgement or condemnation. The confidentiality of the relationship is also considered important. Richard for example, explained he was having counselling at school and how beneficial it is to talk to someone about what is on his mind. *‘This man I go and see he doesn’t teach, but he counsels me in a way. He’s cool because he’s calm, doesn’t shout at you. He’s just relaxing. He just chats to you. He’ll like let you have your say.’* (Richard, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

Nonetheless, some single parent children whilst clearly keen to use counselling support services available to them, worry about the confidentiality of the process, especially school counselling services. They are concerned peers and teachers might observe them using the service, or learn about what they have discussed with the counsellor. In this context Thomas, who clearly had things on his mind he wanted to talk through with

someone who could help, refrained from doing so because he fears what he says will not be kept private.

‘I’m concerned about what they’ll do. They’re the person who’s supposed to talk about problems at home, but if it’s serious then they might report it, even though it’s not really allowed because it’s serious. I don’t really know what they’ll do so I can’t really risk it.’ (Thomas, boy, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Several single parents express a desire that more counselling facilities be available for children since it is felt to take pressure off them as parents. They recognise their children’s need to talk more about their lives and feelings, but some cannot make time themselves, and others find their child will not talk to them. Having someone else fulfil this need is considered very helpful and supportive.

‘Having someone to talk to really helped. That was fantastic because she had somebody to go to...it takes a huge pressure off the parent.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, rural)

4.7.2. Value and importance of childcare facilities/leisure activities for children

Single parents of primary school age children are generally appreciative and content with the level of childcare support facilities available in their local area. Praises are especially given for the breakfast clubs and after-school clubs run by primary schools. Those living in urban areas praise Sure Start centres for providing a range of parenting and child support services as well as offering the opportunity to meet and discuss parenting issues with mothers who have children of a similar age and share similar experiences.

Conversely, single parents with older children are critical of the overall lack of both childcare facilities and leisure activities suitable for teenagers. Some single parents feel this restricts their work and career opportunities as well as job satisfaction since they only have the option of working in education-related jobs in order to be free during after-school hours and school holidays to care for their children. *‘Childcare facilities opens up career opportunities, the opportunities to work and earn money.’* (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban). Others claim that given the absence of childcare support, they were forced to change their working hours or jobs when their children started secondary school. There are also single parents who feel

restricted from accessing any child support services that might exist, through a combination of poor financial resources and information poverty.

‘You’re just living your own life and you don’t know what’s available and if you’re not well educated and you don’t hear about things, you haven’t got a lot of chance... There are a lot of services, but they need to be, everybody needs to be informed of them that exist.’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban)

Parenting classes for single parents with teenage children were particularly mentioned as a needed service, but one they are unsure where they can go to find. Several single parents said they would like parenting classes to help them in disciplining and bringing up teenagers. They worry that in struggling to fulfil all the parental roles they make mistakes, in particular that there might be a lack of consistency in how they discipline their children, that they fail to make boundaries clear, or their communications are predominantly negative and critical rather than positive and encouraging. Some single parents said because they feel isolated through limited social contact it is difficult to gain a perspective on how well they are doing as a parent. They do not have any sense of whether they are handling things the best way or not.

‘If you had something, somebody where you could just go and talk about issues around parenting. Because sometimes you’ve got no way of measuring how well you’re doing or how things are going. But you’ve always got to go out and find the group which is extra work for yourself. Where can I go and get advice, where can I go and get support?’ (Female, single parent group, secondary school children, urban)

Some single parents with older children also express a lack of knowledge and confidence about helping children with homework and want to know where they can access training support. They claim their children’s homework can be difficult to understand and they worry that not being able to help, their children may struggle more to achieve at school.

4.7.3. Older children want their single parent to have the support needed to make new friends

Older single parent children often mentioned wanting their single parent to have access to support groups so they can make friends. Children, like Leah, recognise their parent

can feel lonely and unhappy through lack of opportunities to socialise and believe that by attending a support group their parent might have the chance to meet new people.

‘Groups like for single parents to go to and have meetings and stuff so my mum can make new friends.’ (Leah, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

A few children are frank about hoping that, if their single parent has the support needed to meet new friends, it might reduce the necessity of them providing emotional help for their parent. For example, Isabel who is having to give her single parent mother a great deal of emotional support, feels it would be very beneficial for her single parent mother to meet new people, perhaps even a new boyfriend. It might reduce the pressure she feels having to provide advice and her mother could get a fresh point of view, untainted by the family’s experiences.

‘Nice for mum to have someone to talk to and it would take the pressure off as she could talk to somebody else and get a different point of view as that person wouldn’t have gone through what we’ve gone through.’ (Isabel, girl, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

4.7.4. Professionals provide a diverse range of services to support single parent children and increasingly use a multi-agency approach

Professionals provide a diverse range of services and support to single parent children who are predominantly referred directly to them by schools. Examples of support provided include - encouragement back into mainstream education; finding alternative education; building confidence and self-esteem; advice on future education/work options; drug advice services; and, providing access to specific services to help the family as a whole such as child/family counselling, childcare for siblings, access to housing benefits, family support workers, benefits advice for the parent and parenting support groups.

Most professionals supporting single parent children seek holistic solutions using a multi-agency approach. It is not thought possible to offer constructive support to a child in isolation from the family. For example, a family support worker for children not accessing education explained that in the majority of situations the first action she takes after a child has been referred to her is to set up a multi-agency team meeting, the key purpose of the meeting being to gain a common baseline of information about the client and their family, and to determine future roles and responsibilities for each service

player. In this way all the necessary support services can work more effectively together to meet the particular child's needs in the context of their family situation. Professionals also talk about positive developments in multi-agency working linked to Local Area Partnerships. These partnerships are felt to benefit family care support because they bring together professionals working in different support areas with a view to achieving more joined-up work.

'To get everyone round a table and look at the parts everyone is going to play is so beneficial for that child.' (Female, professional, rural)

However several professionals argue that multi-agency work could be improved, especially through greater consistency and continuity of services. There is a feeling that some projects suffer through having only limited short-term funding, so restricting new initiatives or longer-term development of services.

'There's a need for a summer school, but they pulled the plug on it. A summer school would help all families.' (Female, professional, urban)

4.7.5. Summary

Children's Voices

- Older single parent children often mentioned wanting their single parent to have access to support groups so they can make friends, believing that by attending a support group their parent might have the chance to socialise and meet new people. This in turn can help relieve pressure on children.
- Many single parent children, particularly older children, are keen for more counselling and support services which could help them talk about and overcome their concerns and worries, since they can sometimes feel emotionally burdened by home pressures.
- However, there are some worries about the confidentiality of such services, especially school counselling services, because of concerns that peers and teachers may observe them using the service or learn about what they have discussed.

Single Parent Voices

- Single parents of primary school age children are generally appreciative and content with the level of childcare support facilities available in their local area. Those living in urban areas are especially positive about the merits of Sure Start centres.
- Conversely, single parents with older children are critical of the overall lack of both childcare facilities and leisure activities suitable for teenagers. They also feel restricted from accessing any child support services that might exist through a combination of poor financial resources and information poverty.
- Parenting classes are particularly mentioned as a needed service, but one they are unsure where they can go to find. Several single parents mention they would like parenting classes to help them in disciplining and bringing up teenagers.
- Some single parents also express a lack of knowledge and confidence about helping children with homework and want to know where they can access training support.

Teachers/Education Support Professionals

- Professionals provide a diverse range of services and support to single parent children who are predominantly referred directly to them by schools. Most professionals supporting single parent children seek holistic solutions using a

multi-agency approach. It is not thought possible to offer constructive support to a child in isolation from the family.

- Professionals also appear keen on developments in multi-agency working linked to Local Area Partnerships. These partnerships are felt to benefit family care support because they encourage more joined-up working between professionals from different disciplines.

4.8. The Future of Children from Single Parent Families

4.8.1. Structural barriers to children achieving their goals

Younger single parent children express no doubts or concerns that they will achieve their ambitions. Even those children with more fanciful aspirations believe everything they want is possible. However, many older children perceive restrictions on achieving their goals. For some children a key constraint is the view they are not clever enough, so limiting their chances of doing well in exams at school or university, or restricting their choice of subject options. For example, Leah worried she is not bright enough to study law and psychology at university, subjects she considers necessary to achieve her career goal of being a social worker.

‘I want to go to university and get a well paid job. I want to be a youth worker or social worker. I want to do law and psychology, but I don’t think I’m clever enough for that.’ (Leah, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

Other constraints raised include a perceived lack of money to help finance practical training courses such as hairdressing, or further education at college or university; and, limited understanding of how to go about applying to and getting accepted by a college or university. For example, Isabel explained she is keen to apply to university, but confused about the process and how she might access funding to pay for the course. She fears that such problems and worries might inhibit her applying.

‘I’d like to go to university although I’m very confused what you have to do. I’d like to do an archaeology and photography course. But trying to afford the cost of the course and the housing. I think you can get some help, grants and bursaries, but I don’t really know what these are.’ (Isabel, single parent child, 16 years, rural)

Future financial liabilities and how they might impact on their lives are also a serious worry for several older children. From the perspective of their current family situation, the potential to fall into debt seems a likely constant probability, whilst ensuring they are not in debt appears a problematic process. Finding the financial resources to pay bills is also a frightening prospect. A few teenagers are very specific about the aspects of their future finances they are most concerned about. For example, Thomas said he is especially wary about having to handle the paper work involved in paying bills. ‘*When I’m older I’m not looking forward to seeing all the paper when I have to sort out the bills.*’ (Thomas, boy, single parent child, 14 years, rural)

Future financial worries can also impinge on school life. Several young people like Shannon, expressed a fear of failure in school exams because the consequence would be they do not get a good job and earn good money. In turn they worry this could lead them to face a life of financial difficulties. *'I've planned my course, the course I want to do after school. I really want to get in. I'm scared of failing as I've planned out my life.'* (Shannon, girl, single parent child, 16 years, urban)

4.8.2. Nonetheless most children have positive ambitions

The majority of single parent children are fairly positive and optimistic about their future prospects. Many younger children's ambitions like those of Joe and Bobby are fairly fantasy-like, but nonetheless quite specific and hopeful. *'When I grow up I want to work with animals. I want five children when I'm older and live in the countryside.'* (Joe, boy, single parent child, 9 years, urban). Many older children have a clear idea of what they would like to do work-wise with their lives, outlining their plans for careers and the training they intend to undertake to be able to take on such roles. They are also determined and motivated to achieve their goals, like Erin who wants to study law because TV shows make it appear an attractive career. Only a few secondary school children said they had no ideas about what they wanted to do when they left school.

'I'm planning to study law. It seems quite interesting and the pay is good as well and it looks good on shows on TV like 'Law and Order', 'CSI' and 'The Bill'. (Erin, girl, single parent child, 15 years, urban)

Linked with their general sense of ambition, is awareness amongst older children of the need to play an active role in their own future by doing well at school and getting the best exam results they can. For example, Jade who wants to be a fashion designer said she recognises the importance of concentrating on her school work in order to get good grades. And Leon who has ambitions to be a footballer, said he realises this will not be possible if he is lazy and just waits around for opportunities to come his way; he will have to help make things happen.

'These are the most important years of my life and I can't afford to mess about. I want to get the best grades I can get. I want to be a fashion designer.' (Jade, girl, single parent child, 14 years, urban)

'I feel I'm not going to have a future just hanging around here just waiting for something to happen. I will do stuff, make something happen. If you lay around you won't get what you really want.' (Leon, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

In considering their future, many older children convey a desire to be more successful than their single parent in relation to financial affairs, particularly in terms of a resolve not to get into debt. They recognise the negative repercussions of debt and are determined that they will not have to suffer the consequences as an adult in the way they have as a child. The general belief is that to do well financially and avoid debt, they need to get a good job which pays well, and not have to rely on benefits. This is therefore a key aim.

'I don't want to go on benefits. I would like to get a job.' (Secondary school boy, single parent child group, rural)

A number of older children also want to ensure that the quality of their housing is better than they have experienced as a child. Some respondents describe specific and idealistic plans they have for living in their own nice house in a nice area, with all the accoutrements they currently lack in their family home. Hannah wants to furnish a home in her own particular style, and Richard who gets out of breathe when climbing steps, wants to build a lift in his house to make it easier to get upstairs.

'I'm looking forward to having my own place. I can make it how I like, have all the furniture and do it up nicely.' (Hannah, girl, single parent child, 14 years, urban)

'I'd like a nice house with a lift so it's easier to get upstairs.' (Richard, boy, single parent child, 12 years, urban)

4.8.3. Summary

Children's Voices

- Whilst younger children have no doubts or concerns that they will achieve their ambitions, many older children perceive restrictions on achieving their goals.
- The main constraints are thought to be lacking the money to finance further education, and not being clever enough to pass the exams required to enter college or university.
- Future financial liabilities and how they might impact on their lives, particularly the potential to fall into debt, are a worry for some teenagers.
- Nonetheless, the majority of single parent children are positive and optimistic about their future prospects.
- Younger children's ambitions can be fairly fantasy-like, but are still quite specific and hopeful.
- Older children usually have a clear idea of what they would like to do work-wise with their lives, outlining training and career plans. They are also determined and motivated to achieve their goals.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF TEXT BOOKS

In order to analyse the books accessed by the younger primary school age children, during the data collection period in the schools each school allowed the researchers free access to school libraries and reading schemes. Of the books available aimed at this age group of children, there was no evidence of books or reading materials that represented, either in text, photographic or pictorial form, single-parent families. Furthermore, the teachers and professionals who participated in this research were unable to identify texts that might achieve this. However, the range of books seen clearly represented family diversity from some aspects: black and ethnic minority families; difference in gender roles and expectations; and differing sizes of families. For example, 'Maya's Family' (Reimer, 2003) shows an Asian family of three children, one male and one female parent, and a grandmother; 'Poor Monty' (Fine, 2002) conveys diversity in gender roles with Monty's mother being a 'busy doctor' and the illustrations in the book showing a male in the home washing up and making drinks. In some of the books gender detail was avoided, for example 'Getting to Grandad Bear's' (Oram and Joos, 2001), had 'big bear' and baby bear being on their way to visit Grandad – neither baby bear nor 'big bear' being assigned genders. Where, on occasion, only one adult was shown or talked about, often a second parent was alluded to, or there was no mention of family status as for example in 'The Jolly Trolley' (Berridge, 1991). Many of the books focused on daily family activities and included representation in photographs and pictures.

As the children in this age group were learning to read, they were using specific, nationally approved standard reading schemes; for example the Oxford Reading Tree, a popular reading programme in the UK, being used in approximately 14,000 primary schools. This scheme aims to provide a range of skills and strategies for reading and is divided into a number of reading stages. However, from the reading scheme books examined within the schools, no specific evidence of reference to, or representation of, single-parent families was seen.

Secondary school teachers were asked which books they used and recommended as part of the school curriculum, especially for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), to convey and prompt discussion about different family circumstances, including single parent families. The teachers referenced several books that specifically featured single

parent children. Two books by Jacqueline Wilson (2003, 2004) were recommended for their direct, yet sensitive coverage of single parent family issues: 'Lola Rose', which recounts the story of a brother and sister and their mother who leave the family home after the father has become physically abusive, and move to London where they try to find a new home and face a variety of family crises; and 'Diamond Girls' which focuses on the lives of four girls living on a run-down housing estate with their pregnant single parent mother. 'Stone Cold' (Swindells, 1993) depicts the story of Link, a young man who hates his step-father and runs away, becoming homeless in London. Teachers found the book facilitates lots of discussion about step families and how they interact. Finally, 'Buddy' (Hinton, 1982) describes Buddy's life with his single parent father, exploring the relationship between father and son in some detail, as well discussing how Buddy interrelates with and feels about his absent mother.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

6.1. Limited knowledge of family status

None of the schools participating in the research keep data in their school records on whether a child is from a single or two-parent family. The teachers interviewed said they are often completely unaware a child is from a single parent family. *'I have to admit I'm not even aware which students are from single parents and which aren't and so from that point of view it's not even a factor in what I'm looking at.'* (Female, secondary school teacher, urban). Although some teachers from smaller primary schools, whilst not aware throughout the school as to which children have single parents, are able to identify single parent children within their own class.

'There are some of the children that come and speak to me that we know are from single parents that do come and talk to me, but I wouldn't be able to discriminate between the two...but obviously I would know the children in my class.' (Female, primary school teacher, urban)

It is not thought necessary to know which children are from single parent families since single parenthood is only one of many different variants of family background represented in their schools. Furthermore, single parent children are not considered a minority group. Teachers believe there are large numbers of single parent children in their schools, even if they do not know the precise number. There is also thought to be good awareness amongst their fellow teachers of the complexity of family background, including single parenthood, of the children in their classes.

'There is really wide awareness amongst the staff that a lot of children do have just one parent. People are very aware that there are a variety of home backgrounds sitting in front of you.' (Female, secondary school teacher, rural)

6.2. Definitions of single parent family

There are no specific definitions of single parenthood in use in any of the researched schools. Teachers, some of whom are single parents themselves, tend to have very different personal definitions based around the family situations of single parent children they know in their school, including children growing up not knowing one parent, children who have a parent that has died, children spending the majority of their time with only one parent, and children living with one parent all the time. Furthermore,

many teachers consider a precise definition difficult or even impossible since they are aware of so many different examples of single parent families.

‘I wouldn’t have a definition because I can think of so many different examples. Thinking of the ones in my year group I couldn’t give a definition because it’s so diverse.’ (Female, secondary school teacher, urban)

Some teachers claim the term ‘single parent’ is a misnomer since they can think of examples in their school where parental care of a child is split between two parents living separately in two homes. Therefore they feel the literal definition of there being only one parent does not hold true. *‘Some of the families in our school still have a lot of contact with the other parent and they split the care and that sort of thing. It’s not a single parent completely alone always.’* (Female, secondary school teacher, urban)

6.3. Focus on the child as an individual not its parental background

There are no specific policies, practices or official directives on how teachers should relate to single parent children in use at any of the participating schools. Neither does any school provide training for teachers and school staff on how to work with children from single parent families, or provide specific programmes that target children from single parent families. Teachers are consistently of the opinion this is beneficial since single parent children are not being labelled or discriminated against in any way. The majority of teachers believe each child should be treated as an individual, recognising their particular personal needs and working towards meeting those. It is thought unconstructive and inappropriate to judge children on the basis of their parents.

‘Assumptions aren’t made, “you’re from a single parent family so that must mean that..” Those assumptions aren’t made and people aren’t judged on the basis of their parents, they are judged as people in the classroom and who they are.’ (Female, secondary school teacher, urban)

Only in circumstances where a child is experiencing difficulties with their behaviour or education is it thought beneficial to know more detail about the child’s specific family background and circumstances, to enable the school to more effectively help the child. Experience has shown schools it is essential to determine the individual circumstances of the child, since there is such a diversity of possible issues that might be affecting the child’s school performance. In tandem, it is considered inappropriate to approach an

issue through the context of a child being from a single parent family since a child's single parent background may not be the predominant influencing factor. In general, children from single parent families have not been found to be any more needing of educational or behavioural support than their counterparts in two-parent families. Single parent background is not felt to have any bearing on academic success or behaviour.

'I don't think there should be additional support just because they're from a single parent family. There should be additional support if their education needs it, just like it would be in any other scenario. Not all children from single parent families do need extra support and some children from other types of family will need it.'
(Female, secondary school teacher, urban)

6.4. Antipathy to the concept of a 'best practice guide' for teaching children from single parent families

The majority of teachers are strongly antipathetic to the idea of a 'best practice guide' being used to help teach children from single parent families since it conflicts with a core facet of their school's philosophy, to treat each child as an individual. Most teachers feel such a guide would lead to assumptions being made about single parent children's educational ability and behaviour, resulting in labelling and discrimination. They also think it might be too generic to provide effective solutions. The circumstances faced by any single parent child are considered so individual and variable, it is impossible to be prescriptive about responses.

'I think some people could be very upset by that and that could be classified as labelling. As far as behaviour and educational progress in schools is concerned, I think we just need to treat every person as an individual and not say you are like this because you come from a single parent family.'
(Female, secondary school teacher, rural)

Additionally, many teachers fear the introduction of such a guide would give an impression that children from single parent families are, as a group, different from children with two parents. It would also imply that single parent children face more problems at school, which in the large majority of cases, is not thought to be the case. Some teachers claim that children in families with two 'warring' parents, or families where a step parent is introduced, face far more difficulties in their school life than a child in a happy single parent family.

‘A single parent family can be just as effective as a family with two parents. For some children being with one parent may be a whole lot better for them. So I don’t want to make an assumption that a single parent family is dysfunctional therefore a child will misbehave or not progress at school as well. In a way it’s discrimination and a bit of prejudice rolled in there.’ (Female, secondary school teacher, rural)

6.5. Good practice in educational and behavioural support for children (including from single parent families)

The research elicited a range of good practice examples of educational and behavioural support for any child, whether from a single parent family or not. A common characteristic of the good practice is an emphasis on inclusion and achievement, with strong efforts being made to motivate and to keep a child within the school rather than have them excluded.

Internal support centre

One of the participating secondary schools offers an internal support centre giving children the opportunity to spend time away from mainstream classes if they are having emotional or behavioural difficulties. The key objective is to support and encourage children back into mainstream learning rather than keeping them out, through a focus on understanding and meeting their social and emotional needs. Children are offered more one-to-one learning and behaviour support in a venue that is quieter, more relaxed and less formal than mainstream school.

Learning facilitators

The practice at one of the secondary schools is to place each child in a learning family of 12-15 students of the same age group, headed by a learning facilitator. The children stay with the same learning facilitator who meets them on a weekly basis, throughout their secondary school career. The responsibility of the learning facilitator is to give informed, helpful and timely learning support, guidance and counselling which can involve for example, helping children with coursework difficulties, developing study skills and improving children’s understanding of learning. The long-term nature of the relationship means the learning facilitator will know the children in their learning group very well, giving them better insight into the children’s individual situation, and any problems or difficulties they might face. From the children’s perspective, they know there is always someone there in the school whom they can talk with, any time they feel the need.

Learning mentors

Several primary and secondary schools operate a system of learning mentors. Each learning mentor works with a small number of 15-20 students. Their role is to 'rekindle excitement' for learning in students by interventions on a one-to-one or group basis, which focus on achievement levels, attitudes to and skills for learning, self-esteem, confidence and attendance. Key reasons for a child being referred to a learning mentor include needing more time or skill than can be offered by a learning facilitator, a poor attendance record, not meeting target grades, or staff concern about their social relationships. Learning mentors will assess the needs of each identified student, contact parents and set goals at the beginning of their work. Targets are set for the student each fortnight. Their work is at most a six-month intervention.

Circle Time and Golden Time

Several primary schools employ a range of initiatives within the classroom that seek to engage and enhance children's learning experience, confidence and self-esteem. Most notably these include 'Circle Time' which provides children with an opportunity to talk together, facilitated by the teacher, when they can discuss a range of personal issues and concerns. And 'Golden Time', a once a week opportunity for children to choose what they want to do in terms of 'good behaviour'.

Peer support

One of the secondary schools operates a peer support scheme run by students for the benefit of students. The scheme is referred to by the acronym RESPECT with the letters standing for Respect Every Student's Personal Experience with Confidence and Trust. The key objective behind peer support is to give children with problems people they can turn to before approaching a teacher. The peer supporters are trained to listen to a child's problems and offer options for action, but do not provide advice or give judgement.

Connexions personal advisers

Both secondary schools have Connexions personal advisers located in offices on the school premises. These personal advisers not only offer confidential advice and guidance on career options for students, but also provide personal support to any young person who has issues which affect their education or barriers to self-development. They are available on specified days and times for one-to-one discussions with any student who would like support or advice.

Positive comment books

Positive comment books are used by a secondary school to encourage achievement amongst students who have a negative attitude to learning and frequently face criticism for their behaviour or educational attainment. Each child given a positive comment book is assigned a teacher who will look out for any slight positive thing that the child achieves at school. The observed action or behaviour is written up by the teacher, and the child is requested to take the book home and have it signed after being read by a parent. The aim is that praise and positive comment will help encourage a more positive learning and behaviour attitude from the child at school.

Achievement and incentive schemes

A reward scheme for students is run by a secondary school to encourage effort and achievement. Children can be awarded points by any teacher for individual pieces of work, improvements in behaviour or particular tasks carried out. The points are stamped into learning logs as well as onto work. They are counted by learning facilitators and the students at the end of each week, and added to a running total. There are special awards for students with the most points as the end of each term module.

The school also runs an achievement and incentive scheme for all children in Year 11. Every student is given target grades by the school to achieve in each of their GCSE exams. If the child meets those target grades, they receive a financial incentive of £10 per subject. Students and parents are informed of the target grades and the financial incentives involved. The aim is to encourage better exam performance amongst students living in an area of poverty, recognising that ‘middle class’ parents are better able to use financial inducements to persuade their children to achieve.

6.6. School classroom practice in communicating the notion of family

It is a requirement of the English national curriculum for PSHE that knowledge, skills and understanding of specific aspects of family life are communicated during key stages 2, 3 and 4 of primary and secondary school. Notions of the family that should be taught include recognising the stages of emotions associated with loss and change caused by death, divorce, separation and new family members, and recognising the range of lifestyles and relationships in society. In this context, teachers at all participating schools stress the importance of not isolating and focusing on single parent families as a discrete and particular type of family. Teachers feel they have a responsibility to

represent all the different types of family relationships, of which single parents is just one of many. Therefore they avoid talking about single parent families alone, with any references being made within the context of the many other types of family structure that exist. It is judged inappropriate to focus a lesson on single parent families, since this would imply they are in some way more special or problematic than any other family situation. Classroom practice is also to avoid reference to any stereotypical family scenarios since teachers do not want to cause upset by making assumptions about family situations.

One school for example, includes a relationship module within the PSHE curriculum for Year 8 that involves students talking about changing relationships, from being a small child to becoming an adolescent through to being an adult. All the different types of family that might be experienced are discussed, including same sex parent families, divorced families, and two-parent and single parent families. The class is broken up into small groups, and within those groups students ask each other about their own set up at home and they talk about the differences between their families. Another school uses family scenarios from popular soap operas such as 'East Enders' as a basis for talking about the diverse range of family situations. Additionally, one teacher noted that in the past children were asked to draw a family tree as part of their PSHE homework, but that family trees are now avoided since it is thought likely to generate confusion and upset amongst some children.

6.7. Summary

Teachers

- Teachers are generally unaware which children in their school are from single parent families, although some teachers in smaller primary schools could identify single parent children within their own class.
- It is not thought necessary to know which children have single parents since single parenthood is one of many different family backgrounds represented in their schools.
- A specific definition of single parenthood is considered inappropriate since there are known to be so many different variants

- Only in circumstances where a child is experiencing difficulties with their education or behaviour is it thought beneficial to know more detail about the child's specific family background and circumstance.
- In general, children from single parent families have not been found to be any more needing of educational or behavioural support than their counterparts in two-parent families. Single parent background is not felt to have any bearing on academic success or behaviour.
- The majority of teachers are antipathetic to the idea of a 'best practice guide' being used to help teach single parent children since it conflicts with a core facet of their school's philosophy, to treat each child as an individual.
- The research study elicited a range of good practice examples of educational and behavioural support for any child, whether from a single parent family or not, including: learning facilitators, learning mentors, circle time and golden time, internal support centres, peer support, Connexions personal advisers, positive comment books, and achievement and incentive schemes.

Chapter 7: Feedback Workshop

All the single parent children that had participated in the research undertaken in Bristol and Cornwall were invited to a feedback workshop held at a central venue in Bristol on 2 December 2006. Turnout was relatively low primarily because the research had been conducted with families living in some of the furthest reaches of SW England. It proved unrealistic to expect children to travel to one central destination for such an exercise.

Stimulus material was used for the workshop based upon 15 key findings from the research fieldwork. The children were encouraged to talk around each of these findings and their responses explored. The children were also given 'tick charts' of several statements relating to some of the more sensitive research findings. Each child was asked to individually tick whether they 'agreed' or 'disagreed' with each of these statements. Discussion then followed around any of the issues referenced that the children wanted to discuss in more detail.

The children participating in the workshop expressed general agreement with most of the emerging research themes as follows:

- The best thing about family life is when you can spend time doing things together outside the home.
- Young people want to help their single parent as much as they can. They feel responsible for their parent.
- I have to do too many jobs at home to help my parent. I would rather be spending time with my friends.
- There are not enough places where you can go and play with your friends: no space to play, too few youth clubs/leisure facilities, safety worries.
- Young people feel that they cannot spend enough time with their parent: too busy working, looking after other children in the family.
- Young people often spend more time with their friends than with their parent.
- I get angry as I never have the chance to talk to my parent, they are always too busy.
- If your parent is too busy to talk, it's good if you can find someone else to talk to with, to get things off your chest.
- I never get treated differently because I'm from a single parent family.

- Lots of young people feel poor. They do not have enough money to: go on family trips out, go out with friends, buy the same things as friends have, go on school trips, do normal teenage stuff.
- Ways of managing with too little money: tell parent in advance about school trips, say all your friends have something, get paid for doing jobs at home, money from grandparents, part-time work.
- My family's financial problems are the fault of the government.
- Young people have lots of plans for their future, but worry they will not do well enough in exams, or have the money, to do what they want.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The voices of single parent children in this research study provide revealing insights and a perceptive understanding of how poverty and social exclusion directly influence their daily living experiences. Poverty and social exclusion are shown to operate as powerful forces of disadvantage, affecting the relationships they have with their parents, their ability to make and sustain friendships, their school life, and their emotional well-being. However, when children are taken into consideration in policy terms, the focus is not on their actual experiences of social exclusion and poverty as children, but on the risk they will face in adult life and their implications for the economy and social stability (Ridge, 2003a). The emphasis is generally on children as ‘citizens of the future’ (Lister, 2003). Through discussion of several cross-cutting themes emerging from the study findings we show, from a child perspective, how a convergence of poverty and social exclusion factors affect the daily child lives of single parent children, and how and why these factors need to be combated through policy change if the government’s child poverty eradication strategy is to succeed.

Single parent children have an understanding of family based on social relationships

Current UK single parent family-linked policy is based on the perception that family life revolves around only mother and father as an economic and parental institution, with the emphasis on marriage (HM Treasury, 1999) and (DWP 2002, 2006). However, this study reveals that single parent children have a more sophisticated understanding of the role families play, locating economic and care support in a broader social framework than just one or two parents, with whom they may live the majority of the time. Most children find ‘single parent family’ an inaccurate descriptor of their own family. Their understanding of family is more about social than biological relationships and as such is often a fluid and dynamic experience. They include in their families step-siblings, ‘daddies’ living in homes other their own, as well as other family members and family friends.

Some single parent children spend a considerable amount of time in the care of adults other than their single parent, especially grandparents. Not only do extended family and family friends frequently provide the child-care that enables some single parents to work, they may help alleviate some of the impacts of poverty and social exclusion on

single parent children - enabling children to participate in leisure activities, providing pocket money so children can afford to socialise, giving emotional support in the form of someone to talk to, and providing male/female positive role models when children have no or negative relationship with their absent parent. Those children whose single parent is unable to benefit from such valuable help and support can feel more socially isolated, and suffer more directly from the effects of poverty. These findings suggest that single parent families would benefit from being able to live close to their family and friends, but social housing policies are currently not sensitive to this issue (DfETR, 2000) and (ODPM 2000, 2004, 2005).

Additionally, from a child perspective single parenthood can lead to a better quality of family life with some significant advantages: in particular, having a more relaxed home as opposed to shouting and anger when their two parents were together, and in some cases freedom from domestic violence. Yet the implication within policy discourse is that the two-parent family is a better family institution, with single parenthood and the single parent family, treated as either a social problem or a social threat.

Policy Recommendations

Supporting the role of the family

- Policy making needs to consider the role of the extended family, the fluidity and dynamic of family life, and that children are likely to experience a variety of family arrangements.
- Single parenthood should be recognised as a common stage in the life cycle with a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- At the same time, the positive side of single parenthood should be acknowledged; the quality of life for children and their parents can improve. Policy discourse should stop treating single parenthood as either a social problem or as a social threat.
- In every day life discourses, single parenthood can be perceived by members of single parent families as an escape from patriarchal and abusive relationships. The positives of being in a single parent family – freedom from violence/arguments etc should be addressed by policy makers.
- Tackling violence against women should be a key cross cutting strategy across different government departments and public services.

Children are active in helping to strengthen single parent families

Government policies to eradicate child poverty have resulted in an artificial separation of children and parent(s) welfare. The child and adult element of benefits and tax credits have been separated, yet the well-being of mothers cannot be divorced from that of their children. When in poverty, mothers will tend to take responsibility to make ends meet which can have a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health which can affect their ability to parent (Women's Budget Group, 2005). This child adult separated model also underpins the government's focus on reducing 'joblessness' amongst single parents and fails to acknowledge the interplay between financial and time poverty affecting single parents and therefore their children. At the same time childcare policies are found wanting with respect to single parent families. A National Childcare Strategy was launched in 1998 and extended childcare programmes introduced in 2004 (HM Treasury), but despite great progress, the childcare promise has been undermined by the marketisation of day care provision and single parent families have benefited less from the expansion in programmes (Stanley et al, 2006). Many single parents work atypical hours (La Valle et al, 2002) and so their need for childcare cannot be met by standard 8-6pm 'wrap around' care. A direct result of single parents having to juggle employment and childcare responsibilities single-handedly is that their children are forced to play an active role in helping maintain the effective running of the home. Single parent children make considerable contributions to the well-being of their families (Ridge, 2006). In many cases without the input of their children, single parents would be unable to cope in combining employment with family care.

Our study shows that many single parent children regularly undertake housework including cleaning and tidying up and some older children take on adult care and support work such as looking after younger siblings whilst their parent works. Children can also assume emotional responsibility for their parent, trying to help their parent cope with stress and depression, and experiencing hopelessness in their inability to adequately deal with that. In this context, some children said they hoped their single parent could be given support to meet new friends as this would reduce the burden on them of providing emotional help. It is also apparent that children's efforts to support their families can have negative repercussions on their school work and attendance, as well as contributing to their social exclusion from play and leisure activities with friends.

Additionally, single parent children frequently use coping strategies to help their families avoid the worst repercussions of poverty (Shropshire and Middleton, 1999) and (Ridge, 2002). Popular methods include giving advance warning so their single parent can save up the required money; tempering financial expectations and requests for money; and accessing funds from extended family through persuasion or doing chores that earn them money. Having a part-time job is a popular and sought-after means to increase personal funds amongst older children, thereby helping reduce pressure on their parent to support them financially, or enabling them to make a contribution to family income. However, few children said they had been able to find such work and it seems many teenagers are constrained by their poor environments, with few part-time job vacancies available in the areas they live.

Policy Recommendations

Supporting the care of children

- Unhappiness of the parent will be felt by the child – so that policies that relieve the pressure on the adult - e.g. childcare; financial support; freedom from violence/anger - will relieve pressure on the child.
- Childcare needs to be more accessible; more affordable; reaching a broader age group. Extended schools will help in this respect, but in addition children's care would be strengthened by:
 - the extension of tax credits for formal childcare to informal childcare provided by the extended family.
 - strategic investment and development of community-led Home Childcare Social Enterprises in deprived neighbourhoods.
- The extension of childcare tax credits for parents with more than two children; nursery provision for children of 3-4 years for 16 hours a week, to be negotiated around working hours.

Importance of and need to strengthen the single parent-child relationship

Children's close and confiding relationships with parents are an important source of emotional support, but whilst family relationships can help reduce the impact of disadvantage for children, they may themselves be undermined by the effects of poverty (Attlee, 2006). This research study highlights how and why poverty affects the nature of the single parent-child relationship. The relationship a child has with their single parent is very close and significantly important for the child. Where that relationship is functioning positively and strongly, it provides the essential stability and emotional bedrock for the child to withstand any difficulties associated with changing family circumstances. It enables a child to feel their family is a solid, safe, secure and comfortable unit irrespective of any fluidity in its structure, and even if teachers and professionals mistakenly view it as 'chaotic'. From the child's perspective, it is vitally important for them to spend quality time with their single parent if the relationship with that parent is to be properly sustained and for them to benefit from it. In particular, they enjoy spending time sharing activities outside the home with their single parent, with the opportunity to really talk and communicate, share jokes and have fun together. However, a convergence of time and financial poverty factors often militate against this with the reality that such family occasions are infrequent and sporadic.

By failing to take account of the importance that children and parents place on 'time to care', government policies on reducing 'joblessness' amongst single parents, underpinned by the child parent separated model, have generated serious negative consequences for single parent children. As a result of their parent having to manage employment and childcare single-handedly, single parent children are at greater risk of suffering the impacts of their parent's time poverty. Single parents are also more likely to be working atypical hours necessitating more flexible childcare. Yet a system of formal childcare however flexible can never replace the need for parental childcare (Giullari and Lewis, 2005). Our research findings reveal that many children, especially older children whose single parent works or studies, complain of lack of quality family time together, and restricted opportunities to talk with their parent about things which are important to them. They end up spending a greater amount of time with and under the influence of their friends, than they do with their parent. Others complain of being bored or lonely due to more time being spent at home on their own. The consequential weakened single parent-child relationship can also have quite serious emotional

repercussions, making children feel neglected, angry and frustrated and very much in need of a talking outlet to relieve their emotional burdens. Many teenagers are keen for more counselling and support services. Those with experience of the services praised special learning units, learning mentors, tutor groups and counselling, which help and support them to talk about and overcome their concerns, although there are some worries about confidentiality of school counselling services.

Working single parents are themselves acutely aware of being in a ‘catch 22’ situation in terms of the interplay between financial and time poverty, and often see no way out of the dilemma. They only too readily recognise that having to work, and often atypical hours, means they are unable to give sufficient time to the support of their children, especially their older children. This puts more emotional burden on their already overloaded shoulders as they feel that society will blame them if, through lack of regular interaction and attention time with their teenage children, the children end up getting into trouble at school or out on the streets. They argue for more accessible and affordable childcare; more flexible, child-friendly employment hours; and, better quality part-time employment. Some parents also seek access to parenting classes to help in disciplining and bringing up teenagers, feeling the training may help them build a better and stronger relationship with their children.

Policy Recommendations

Time poverty

- Time poverty is a significant factor in children’s lives. Adult employment policies should take this into account given that the UK works the longest hours in the EU. The UK should adhere to the time directive policy.
- There has been too great a concentration on welfare into work policies without taking a more holistic view. The child parent separated model underpinning the focus on reducing joblessness amongst single parents does not fully recognise the importance of ‘time to care’. There is also an assumption that marketised formal day care can meet all the needs of the parent in paid work and their children. These children’s voices clearly indicate childcare is embedded in relationships of love and intimacy that can never be fully substituted by formal childcare. Children want quality time with their parents. Single parent family policies should take into account the impact of time poverty on children’s lives and better meet the need for ‘time to care’.

- Older children in particular, want more time with their parents. In order for the proposed Work Related Activity Premium policy to work for parents with children over 11, the gap in childcare and leisure provision for children of secondary school age needs to be acknowledged and diminished.

Emotional support

- Research findings support the present government policy of investment in family mediation at a time when families split up to help work through the parents' responsibilities for the emotional health of the children, with additional resources needed for family therapy.
- Holistic support i.e. special learning units, learning mentors, tutor groups and counselling services which help and support children in talking about and overcoming their concerns and worries, need to be further extended in schools.
- Children should have access to more confidential support if they feel the need, given that some express fear they could be further stigmatised in the school if what they talk about becomes more widely shared.
- Continuing government investment is needed in parenting support groups
- More positive education and discussion is needed on the role of fatherhood in a changing society.
- More government investment should be made available for family self-help groups where isolated parents can socialise and make new friends, helping to create more positive social networks for children in the process.

Children feel single parenthood is normal but still experience some covert as well as inadvertent stigmatisation

The prevalence of single parent families, particularly in an urban context, results in an explicit discourse of normality with the majority of single parent children not experiencing stigma. They do not perceive their family situation to be unusual or a cause for interest or response amongst other children. Single parent family background is rarely considered a reason for bullying or victimisation in or outside school. Overt criticism of single parents and their children is now predominantly confined to areas with few single parent families, notably small and isolated rural communities. However, there are manifestations of more covert stigmatisation even in communities where single parenthood is regarded as the norm, with single parents believing their parental

status will be blamed for any anti-social behaviour from their teenage children. The impression that single parents do better than other parents in terms of state handouts also persists. It is likely these views are being propagated by negative commentary on single parenthood in the media and from some politicians.

Single parent children, especially those attending secondary school, also experience some inadvertent stigmatisation in their school lives. Teachers may claim they are alert to not wanting to engage in any discriminatory practice in relation to single parent children, actively pursuing policies that support the 'Every Child Matters' (2004) agenda of focusing on the child as an individual not its parental background. They also argue there are no issues, behavioural, social or emotional, solely the domain of children from single parent families. Nonetheless teachers, as well as educational support professionals, seem to hold some stigmatising notions that when single parent children do exhibit difficulties with achievement or behaviour, it is predominantly because of negative factors associated with the child having only one parent. There can also be a failure to appreciate links between family poverty and the school experiences of single parent children, although primary school teachers are better in this respect, for example offering financial support for school trips. And some teachers are prepared to consider broader structural factors that might affect single parent children such as their parent's time poverty. At the same time, lack of awareness can result in some teachers inadvertently being discriminatory in the manner in which they communicate with single parent children and their parents, such as inappropriately addressing letters home or not taking account of single parent's availability when arranging meetings. Teachers clearly need to be made more aware of the way poverty and social exclusion issues can impact on the school lives of single parent children.

Policy Recommendations

Addressing stigma

- Policy needs to acknowledge the important socio-cultural change evident in the normality of single parent life and lack of stigma for single parent children living in an urban context. A family diversity discourse, in which: single parenthood is conceived as a normal stage of the life cycle and the contribution that single parents bring to society in providing and caring for their children single-handedly is valued, in order to lessen their children's greater risk of poverty, could go a long way to reduce overt stigmatisation in a rural context and covert stigmatisation.

- Politicians that use discriminatory discourse for popular effect as a grounding for policy-making, do not reflect popular opinion, or children's opinion of family life. The recent resurgence in political discourse and policy development of the two parent family being a better family institution, will make life much harder for children in single parent families if they continue to pursue this line.

Single parent children often feel 'poor' and blame the government for their poverty

Single parent children, especially those in secondary school, have a high level of perceptivity and understanding about their family's financial position. They have a keen awareness of their family's household income and expenditure (Ridge, 2006). Many are cognisant of 'being poor' and perceive themselves as worse off financially than children who live with two parents. Younger children recount occasions when their parent did not have sufficient money for something they wanted, whilst older children are more acutely aware of their poverty. They feel relatively poor; especially because of the constant worry they will not be able to afford to go out with friends and the awareness that unlike their peers, they enjoy less frequent family days out and less regular holidays. Also in contrast with their friends, few single parent children receive pocket money. Significantly single parent children, particularly older children, believe government policy directly to blame for their poverty. They often put forward substantive arguments as to why their family's financial circumstances are unfair, and their single parent should pay less tax or receive more benefits to compensate for the fact there is only one, not two parents. They feel government should recognise this disparity and accordingly respond with appropriate policies.

Whilst the views of single parent children are linked to their own learned comparative experiences, they are also more likely than children from two-parent families to learn about their family's financial circumstances from their parents (Shropshire and Middleton, 2005). Single parents are vociferous in their complaints against much government policy, particularly the seemingly perverse incentives in relation to the government's welfare to work policy. Many feel that instead of encouraging them into the labour market the government is penalising them by restricting the number of hours it is possible to work to be able to stay on benefits, in particular through the trade-off they have to make in relation to the child-care element of their tax credits. Nonetheless

single parents have praise for some of the services resulting from government policy, especially for Sure Start centres from parents living in urban areas.

Policy Recommendations

Income poverty

- The findings strongly underline the validity of addressing child poverty from children's perspectives and linking this with single parent poverty.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should underpin policy-making on child poverty.
- Children want their single parent to earn more and work less. Single parents' caring responsibilities, inflexible working conditions and the lack of skills and training support, before and after the take up of paid work, are all central causes for the poverty experienced by children in single parent families. In spite of the government's commitment to addressing child poverty, the focus on reducing joblessness amongst single parents has resulted in a 'work-first' approach which has not worked for the most disadvantaged single parents who experience multiple barriers to employment. There remain considerable challenges with regard to providing the stepping-stones to enable women to move from benefits into employment, and with regard to the sustainability and quality of employment for women on low wages. More holistic resources are needed, dove-tailing together across government departments, addressing not only single parent poverty, but also child poverty in the process. Recommendations include:
 - a gender impact analysis be undertaken of government funded training initiatives with a particular focus on access to skills training for women in part-time work and mothers on benefits wanting to move into paid work.
 - with the current child age limits acting as a barrier to work/life balance, the right to request part-time work should be extended to cover those with older children.
 - single parents on benefits should be able to work more hours per week before their benefit is withdrawn, given the present effective restriction of no more than 3 hours per week.
- Income security in employment is key. Tax credits have been both positive and problematic as they are means-tested and complicated. Clearer information is needed on tax credits for single parents, with higher thresholds for WTC particularly in relation to housing benefit.

- Explore new ways to support those who cannot work as a significant number of single parents will not be in paid work whilst caring for very young children and some with complex needs will never be in a position to be able to work.

Exclusion from friendships

When discussed in a policy context social exclusion is defined in adult terms, as mostly an issue of economic exclusion. Yet children perceive social exclusion as having a relational element. It is difficulties in making and sustaining social relationships that can leave children vulnerable to social exclusion (Ridge and Millar, 2000). To date, the value of children's social relationships has tended to be discussed in terms of 'social capital' (Ridge, 2002) and (Morrow, 2004), but the concept of social capital perhaps fails to reflect the importance of friendship to single parent children. Findings from our study show that it is exclusion from friendship that matters most to children, rather than exclusion from social networks or associations with child peers in general. Friends provide a fundamental source of enjoyment and social support, and single parent children are very precise as to the key ingredients of a good friendship, with trust and mutual understanding having the greatest value. They often want to share intimate and personal details about family issues with friends, without others knowing.

Single parent children's stories highlight how poverty is having a significant negative impact on their capacity to make and sustain friendships. Their testimonies also graphically illustrate the pressures of being poor in a rich society, where material acquisitions, clothes and access to paid leisure activities and enjoyment, frequently determine the extent to which they feel a part of that society. Teenage children especially, say they often face exclusion from their friends because their single parent has been unable to afford to buy them the right look, labels and brands in what they wear. Many also face the constant worry whether they will have enough money to be able to afford to go out with their friends and mention having to forgo some of the trips their friends enjoy such as to the cinema or bowling because they do not have the necessary money. Transport costs are especially problematic for children living in rural areas, where long distances need to be travelled to meet friends or to access any leisure facilities. As Ridge (2006) found, many children are also excluded from school trips enjoyed by their friends because their single parent is unable to afford the costs involved. Furthermore, the pressure on single parents to meet their children's wishes

and expectations to socialise with friends can often compound the family's financial struggles by placing many in debt.

Comparatively poor home environments can add to single parent children's sense of social exclusion. They make some children reluctant to reciprocate with invitations to stay at their own house after sleepovers shared at friend's houses and also place restrictions on children's capacity to play. Many children also mention having a lack of space at home to play and few play areas in the vicinity of where they live. They complain about limited opportunities for organised leisure activities with an absence of local youth clubs and leisure facilities. Safety on the streets is also a worry and concern for some older children, curtailing their desire to walk far to access play facilities beyond their local area. As a consequence, the social worlds of children can be fairly constrained, mainly confined to their home or hanging around playing in the street. Additionally, some older children face exclusion from their friends because their single parent's time and financial poverty forces them to take on adult care responsibilities. Instead of having the time to enjoy playing with friends they are assisting at home.

Policy Recommendations

Social inclusion

- Children in poverty are experiencing ever-increasing social exclusion. In the long-term, this has significant implications for their social mobility in later life.
- The 'social investment' strategy sees children as 'children worker of the future' not children citizens. Social exclusion is defined in adult terms, as mostly an issue of economic exclusion. Children's definition of social exclusion as having a relational element, i.e. exclusion from friends, needs to be taken into account.
- Housing policies need to be reviewed in the UK with the increasing gap between homeowners and those in social housing/private rented accommodation. Children feel unequal to their peers who have greater living space, even if they are not stigmatised by other children for this.
- Strong recommendations are coming from children for investment in leisure activities, youth clubs, swimming pools etc. and for cheap accessible transport for children to get there, particularly in rural areas. Discounts for children using public leisure activities were also a significant request.

Disadvantage within school and post-school

Current research indicates that education and training can provide a means to escape poverty for those who are economically disadvantaged (Machin and McNally, 2006); helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve in school is widely recognised as an effective route out of poverty (Blanden and McNally, 2005). Yet obstructively, education achievement levels remain closely allied with socio-economic background (Feinstein, 2003) and (DfES, 2002). An important factor may be that education policies are directed towards improving children's academic performance as future citizens and workers, rather than paying attention to the quality of social inclusion that 'poor' children are experiencing in childhood (Ridge, 2006). Single parent children's testimonies in our study, especially those of older children, suggest that the disadvantage they are experiencing within and outside school is likely to have a negative impact on their school performance. Unless such factors are addressed, achievement levels amongst the 'poor' are unlikely to show significant improvement.

Single parent children on the whole are very positive about school, especially younger children attending junior and primary schools, suggesting these schools are doing well in terms of education developments. However, there are many examples of negative school experiences linked to poverty revealed by older children attending secondary school, which are likely to have a direct bearing on these children's school performance. This perhaps provides some supportive rationale as to why the education achievement gap between different socio-economic groups widens as children move up through the education system (Feinstein, 2003) and (DfES, 2002). Single parent children can be bullied because their family's poverty results in them wearing the 'wrong' style and brand of clothes and trainers, whilst a poor home environment means it is difficult for some children to find a quiet space to do homework. Many children are unable to go on educational school trips because the cost is prohibitive. Temporary housing provision is a fact of life for several children, reflective of the fact single-parent families are more likely than two-parent families to live in rented accommodation (Clark and Joshi, 2003), which several teachers and professionals believe results in the children having chaotic home lives and subsequent disorganisation in their school lives. Some children diminish the general quality of their school, feeling many aspects of it including quality of teaching and resources, suffer from being in a poor area. Furthermore, the social worlds of single parent children are constrained, with restricted opportunities for educational

learning through organised leisure activities, family days out and play with friends. An issue encouragingly recognised in the Education and Inspection Act 2006, which places a duty on local authorities to provide access for all 13-19 year olds to educational and leisure-time activities and facilities.

Further educational disadvantage for single parent children stems from their parent's time poverty, inhibiting the capacity of parents to give time and attention to their children's school behaviour and achievement, especially assistance with homework. Several single parents also feel they are putting their teenage children at a disadvantage by not having the financial resources to fund extra-curriculum tuition, seen as increasingly the norm for children from wealthier families.

Additionally, children's experiences of poverty and social exclusion tend to have a strong impact on their post-school life expectations. They can become resigned to living in poverty and regard the economic and social limitations they face as normal and the status quo for someone like them (Middleton, 1994), (Roker, 1998) and (Ridge, 2002). The majority of single parent children we spoke to have a good idea about what they would like their future prospects to be, but whilst younger children had no doubts they will achieve their ambitions, many older children perceive clear restrictions on achieving their goals. The main constraints are thought to be a lack of money to finance further education, and not being clever enough to enter college or university. Future financial liabilities and how they might impact on their lives are also a worry for some teenagers, particularly the potential to fall into debt. In tandem, single parent children in general have low financial expectations.

Policy Recommendations

Education

- The training of professionals in real life experiences and educational material on the diversity of family life is impacting positively on schools and should continue to be developed.
- Where this is not taking place, the diversity of single parent families and of families in general should be acknowledged in educational material, with training for teachers to gain insight into single parent children's lives, and a teachers' guide to family diversity.
- Investment in new build and resources for schools are clearly popular with children, especially in deprived neighbourhoods. Where there had been little investment, children felt let down and degraded.
- More research is needed on the impact of social housing policies on school life, and the impact of temporary rented accommodation with families having to move a number of times.

- Poorer children are deterred from entering higher education for fear of long-term debt, with implications for long-term social mobility.
- Benefit policies should include a holiday grant for school related activities.
- Greater awareness is needed in schools about:
 - The diversity of single parent families and of families in general; this should be acknowledged in educational material with training for teachers to gain insight into single parent children's lives and a teachers' guide to family diversity. (We need to recognise that teachers vary within a school and that those more in touch with a child's life/problems could be more aware of the potential for institutional/covert discrimination than others).
 - The role of the extended family and friends, with this understanding included in the social aspects of the curriculum for all children.
 - The potential for more general overt/covert discrimination in schools – not because of children being from a single parent family per se, but because of poverty and low expectations.
 - The impact of poverty on children being bullied.
 - Time poverty and the childcare demands on the family when arranging school meetings.
 - The avoidance of institutionalised discrimination with regard to assumptions that all children have a mother and a father at home.
 - Need for grants for uniform and PE kit subsidies, extra tuition, and school trips.
 - Value of including emotional intelligence in the curriculum to provide a holistic education experience.

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APPENDIX

A. Glossary

CB Child Benefit

CTC Child Tax Credit

CSA Child Support Agency

GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education

HB Housing Benefit

IS Income Support

JSA Job Seeker Allowance

LEA Local Education Authority

MW National Minimum Wage

NDLP New Deal for Lone Parents

PSHE Personal, Social and Health Education

WTC Working Tax Credit

B. Key demographics of single parent children quoted in report

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	School Year	Ethnicity	Place of residence	Type of family	Parent's employment
Abigail	12	Girl	7	Mixed	Rural	Divorced	Not working - student
Annie	6	Girl	4	White	Urban	Single	Working p/t
Ali	13	Boy	9	Black	Urban	Divorced	Not working
Awale	12	Boy	8	Black	Urban	Divorced	Not working
Bobby	7	Boy	3	White	Urban	Divorced	Working p/t
Donald	14	Boy	9	White	Rural	Separated	Working
Elizabeth	14	Girl	10	White	Rural	Widowed	Working p/t
Ellie	16	Girl	11	White	Rural	Divorced	Working
Emily	11	Girl	7	White	Urban	Divorced	Not working
Erin	15	Girl	10	Mixed	Urban	Divorced	Working
Evie	8	Girl	3	White	Urban	Single	Not working – student
Gemma	9	Girl	5	White	Urban	Divorced	Working p/t
Gill	15	Girl	10	White	Urban	Separated	Not working
Hannah	14	Girl	10	Black	Urban	Divorced	Working
Isabel	16	Girl	11	White	Rural	Widowed	Working p/t
Jade	14	Girl	9	Black	Urban	Separated	Working
Jason	10	Boy	5	White	Urban	Separated	Working p/t
Jon	6	Boy	2	White	Rural	Separated	Not working – student
Katie	16	Girl	11	White	Rural	Widowed	Working
Leah	15	Girl	10	Black	Urban	Divorced	Not working – student
Leon	12	Boy	7	Black	Urban	Separated	Not working
Richard	12	Boy	8	White	Urban	Divorced	Working
Shannon	16	Girl	11	Mixed	Urban	Separated	Working p/t
Thomas	14	Boy	9	White	Rural	Divorced	Not working

Greece National Report

By Mouriki, A., Michailidou, M. and Gazon, E.

CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1. General

- Given the lack of focus on single parent families in the context of social policy and education policy it is recommended that measures explicitly designed for the support of single parent families are incorporated into current policy, so as to alleviate social and educational exclusion.
- The introduction of a guaranteed minimum income or the generous increase in cash benefits would minimize the number of those left outside the safety net.

1.2. Provision of services to Single Parent Families

- The empirical findings have shown that there is an acute “*welfare deficit*” in terms of the services provided to children and families in difficulty. As the demand for professional support is rapidly rising, the welfare institutions at the central and local level need to be dramatically reinforced and empowered, in order to address the needs of the population, and in particular of Single Parent Families, that are often invisible to the public authorities.
- *Decentralised and better organized social welfare services*, adequately staffed, should be a priority. A lot more counseling should be offered within the Prefecture welfare services by specialized child psychologists rather than social workers. A social welfare and child protection service should be established within the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity; social workers need to be recruited by the ministries of Education and Justice, so as to ease the burden on the few social workers working at the Prefecture welfare services. Moreover, professionals need continuous training and upgrading of their skills.
- *Soft social services* can be more effective. For example, preventive services, or a service charged with the solution of practical problems faced by SPFs would be very useful; home assistance would also be valuable. To this end, the empowerment of the NGOs that deal with family and children’s issue could drastically improve the reach and effectiveness of prevention policies.

- *Access to information* regarding the rights of SPFs: the establishment of local information services at the municipal or wider neighbourhood level could prove very effective in coordinating, articulating and making more effective the plethora of fragmentary and disjointed policy tools that are available.
- *Early diagnosis of learning difficulties*: the long waiting lists and the lack of appropriate training of primary school teachers dramatically delay the diagnosis of learning difficulties. The sooner this kind of problem is diagnosed, the greater the chances of addressing the situation.
- *Affordable childcare* services should become widely available for pre-school children, as well as childcare services for women working in the afternoon and on Saturdays. The introduction of a “childcare coupon”, as a form of subsidized childcare, could effectively address the problem of inadequate public infrastructure.
- *Access to paid employment* for the single parent in charge of the household constitutes the best remedy to the problems of social exclusion experienced by SPFs. This requires the availability of a wide range of flexible employment options, that do not, however, jeopardize the employment and social security benefits of employees.
- *Low cost decent housing* for SPFs should become available, e.g. through an extended council housing programme. The problem is particularly acute in the case of families in a crisis situation, requiring a safe refuge.
- *Mentoring schemes* involving regular socialisation and activities, especially of male children and teenagers, with men of approved character could aid in the development of appropriate male roles models, according to psychologists and social workers interviewed.
- Most of all, if social policies are to become *better targeted and much more effective*, authorities need to address the problems associated with “late

modernity” with a contemporary and open-minded rather than traditional /anachronistic approach.

1.3. School textbooks and school practices & procedures

- School textbooks need to be drastically reviewed, especially at the primary education level, in order to take account of the new socio-cultural realities, i.e. the changing gender roles, family diversity, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, etc. This would require, in particular, including more representations and images of SPFs as yet another legitimate form of familial organisation, and equal divisions of labour within the family between men and women. This would accurately reflect the diversity and fluidity of contemporary family forms and the organisation of relations and everyday life within the context of the family.
- Psychological and social support and counselling at school should be instituted by the Ministry of Education, and some basic training and sensitisation to the realities of SPFs and the problems children of SPFs might be facing ought to be provided to the teachers, who feel they lack the expertise to deal with such issues on the basis of their teacher training only. School procedures and practices should be modernised to reflect the diversity and variety in the forms of contemporary family life.
- School headmasters need to keep record of the family situation of their students, in order to be able to cope with delicate situations. This must be done in a discrete manner, so as to avoid accusations of interference in the private lives of families.
- *After-school tuition* (outside normal school hours) for students lagging behind in class has proved very effective in preventing early school drop-out and social exclusion. This institution needs to be reinforced and become more widespread, especially in socially deprived areas.

- Schools need to act as mediators between the social services and the SPFs, informing them of their basic rights and entitlements and referring them, wherever necessary, to the competent authorities.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION: BRIEF PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project aimed at enriching our knowledge on single parent families, focusing on the lived experience and corresponding perspectives of children themselves. Children's perspectives have been up to now absent in published Greek social scientific research on topics regarding not only single parent families, but also from social policy research regarding the family in general; additionally, very little is so far recorded on the perspectives even of adult members, usually women, of single parent families, with the notable exception of the research carried out by Dimitra Kogidou (1995). The main rationale guiding the project work and aims in Greece was that, following the so called child-centred turn in international social science research and literature, even though parents' and professionals' perspectives regarding single parent families in Greece are absolutely central in order to investigate and record the life experiences and conditions of single parent families, children's perspectives ought to be investigated and analysed as well, in order to reach a more rounded understanding of the ways in which social exclusion and poverty influence the life of single parent families.

This child centred approach necessitated speaking to the children directly, through the use of qualitative research methods¹⁶, so as to allow their voices, opinions and attitudes to be heard as central part of the research process, a choice of methodology and research practice, which, in its turn, presupposed access to children for interviewing purposes. In this context, children were viewed as social agents rather than simple victims of circumstance, agents who have particular views on their lives and their own attitudes, which they have the right to express. Obviously, children's opinions may be different from their parents; this does not mean that they are the only valid viewpoint, but rather that they need to be taken into consideration alongside those of parents and responsible adults as well as those ones of the relevant professionals providing services to single parent families (social workers, psychologists, and so on).

Within the aforementioned rationale, the specific project aims developed as follows:

- To investigate whether and if so how children of Greek SPFs perceive, experience and manage social exclusion and poverty in their everyday lives

¹⁶ Further on this in section 2.

- To record cross-national similarities and differences regarding the life conditions, standards of life and experiences of children and parents from SPFs
- To investigate if and how local societies, health and welfare agencies and social services in Greece contribute to the social inclusion or exclusion of these families and their children.
- To review current policies and legislation in Greece concerning the family, and the ways these may influence the particular category of SPFs.
- To promote research findings to those organisations and institutions who provide services for SPFs in order to contribute to their sensitisation and the combating of social exclusion.
- To disseminate research findings at a cross-national European level and the promote comparative cross-national research, the development of research and methodological practices appropriate for such research and the corresponding good practices.

The empirical research questions which were formulated out of cross-national co-operation of project partners were as follows:

1. How do children from SPFs in Greece experience their daily lives as members of these families, and more specifically, how do they experience poverty and the multiple forms of social exclusion, including possible stigmatisation, discrimination, and exclusion from particular social relations and contexts which they encounter?
2. How do they experience the services and support which may be provided by the immediate and extended family, their peers, school, local communities, health and welfare agencies, what types of assistance and support do they already use and what kinds (informal and formal) would they like to be available?
3. How are these children treated by members of other social groups, such as their peers, teachers, social workers, in their contact with them?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY USED AND RESEARCH PRACTICE ISSUES

The research sample included children age from eight to sixteen from single and two parent families, parents from single parent and two parent families, and professionals who, as part of their practice in relevant government health and welfare agencies as well as NGOs providing support services, are in regular contact with single parent families, primarily social workers and (child) psychologists, as well as teachers. The sub-sample of children and parents from SPFs contained children and parents from all types of single parent families, following the widest possible definition of an SPF, including, that is, children who lived with one parent (or, less frequently, other responsible adult) who may be divorced, separated, unmarried, or widowed. Respondents were chosen from the greater Attica area, with an emphasis on the inner city area of Kypseli and the neighbourhood of Perama in Piraeus. The former was chosen on the basis of its high density of population and the fact that the majority of its population is on a low to average income while the latter was chosen on the basis of the fact that it constitutes a pocket of extreme social deprivation and high unemployment.

As mentioned in the previous section, the aims of the project dictated the choice of a qualitative approach to the empirical research, in order to allow the articulation and exposition of participants' and especially children's views on the topics investigated within the context of the research process without the imposition of the delimiting framework of a strict predefined questionnaire. This choice of research methods was made all the more advisable in Greece, where no such prior research existed, which meant that this research had to take on a somewhat exploratory character. This did not, of course, mean that there were no interviewing guidelines and sets of questions, but rather that these should not assume the form of a closed questionnaire as they had to allow a degree of flexibility to the interviewing process, so that the interviewer would allow the research subjects to expand further on issues they found noteworthy and articulate their replies accordingly. Research subjects – children and adults – were interviewed with the use of in-depth personal interviews and focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews were selected as a research tool because they allow the development and recording of subjects' ideas through interaction with the views, attitudes, rationale and experiences of other subjects, whilst remaining focused on

particular questions. Because of this they are appropriate for the examination of the collective aspects of children's and parents' experiences, as well as the professionals' attitudes towards SPFs, and of the ways such attitudes and views are differentiated depending on the respondents' social class, gender and age. Focus group interviews were also useful for the recording of the collective needs of SPFs' as a category, in order to guide support measures and interventions, for the articulation of SPFs' collective assessment of support measures and actions, and for the triangulation of research data collected through the individual in-depth interviews.

Individual in-depth interviews were selected as a research tool in order to collect data consisting of rich and detailed accounts of the experiences, views, representations and attitudes of the respondents, and especially the children who might not have responded as positively to a structured questionnaire. In the research context, individual interviews were especially appropriate for examining in some depth the subjective meaning of life experience as a member of a single parent family, the investigation of personal and potentially rather private attitudes, perceptions, ideas and behaviours of the respondents, the articulation of the respondents' personal feelings regarding processes of social exclusion, and, finally, for complementing already existing statistical data on the social exclusion of single parent families with richer qualitative details regarding the meaning of these statistical facts for the population investigated.

The research in the field faced two major sets of difficulties: obstacles regarding access to the population under investigation and obstacles during the course of the interviewing. The research team in Greece faced major difficulties in trying to gain access to children, especially of single parent families, for interviewing purposes. In attempting to gain access to children the research team contacted organisations and agencies, governmental or non-governmental which provide services, primarily welfare and support, to single parent families, as well as primary and secondary education schools. The request for access through the government agencies and state schools proved fruitless for the following reasons: government welfare and support agencies have to deal with very big workloads whilst being generally understaffed. Our request was considered as adding to their already heavy workload and, additionally, internal procedures meant that any request for access had to be processed internally in order to be granted, through laborious bureaucratic procedures, which sometimes ended at the

head of local authorities. As is evident, both the increased workload of the staff involved and the long and laborious bureaucratic processes of approval were strong deterrents to providing access. Additionally, the research topic was considered potentially sensitive, and within the culture of organisations just mentioned, this was potentially considered as an additional deterrent to agency workers getting involved in the project through forwarding our request for access to the parents involved.

Similar reasons created obstacles to getting access to children through the school system. Any formal request for conducting research in schools or gaining access to the school population has to be processed through an again long and laborious process that eventually leads from the Ministry of Education to the Pedagogical Institute, the organisation responsible for matters such as the curriculum and for all matters relating to pedagogical research or research in schools. In the formal procedure school headmasters have no say to start with— applications are processed at the top and the Institute grants permission for researchers to enter specific schools and asks the schools' headmasters to co-operate with researchers' regarding their stated requests. Such applications may take up to or even more than six months to process, as was the case with this project, which makes access through schools de facto inoperative. Also, a generalised culture of paternalism regarding children may have made requests to speak to children directly and in an unmediated fashion appear to both professionals and schools somewhat eccentric or trivial.

Finally, the intense shortage of free time faced by most single parents also meant that making interviewing appointments was sometimes an additional burden to their already heavily booked timetable, and was sometimes considered a disruption to it. Our solution to this was to be as flexible regarding times and places of appointments as was demanded by the life conditions of the subjects interviewed, and it has to be pointed out that despite this lack of time parents and children responded generously and willingly to our request for their time. It also has to be pointed out, on a positive note, that overall, our requests for co-operation in gaining access were welcomed by most of the NGOs providing support services to single and two parent families, perhaps because their organisational structure and ethos made them more flexible and able to co-operate with the research team. Because of this their assistance in gaining access was absolutely crucial to the completion of the field research, as was the informal co-operation of the

headmasters in the Perama schools and the Experimental School of the University of Athens.

3.1. Statistical review of Single Parent Families in Greece

3.1.1. Definitions of the SPF

The SPF may be defined as a household which is composed by one parent and at least one child without children and regardless of the child's age. Another perspective is to focus on child dependency. In this case, the SPF could be defined as one adult and at least one dependent child. The dependent child is defined as a person aged below 16 or 18 years old. It could also be defined, as Eurostat does, in a more extended way, either as a person below 16 years, or between 16-24 years old who is economically inactive and so economically dependent. In the present paper, the dependent child will be defined as a person below 16 years old. The comparison between SPFs and TPFs (Two Parent families) will be restrained to families with at least one child below 16 years old. This choice has been made because of our interest in living conditions, social exclusion and poverty of children in SPFs.

Household categories	Number of households	Percent per household	Percent per all household with children
SPF (I) up to 16	42497	1,2%	4,0%
SPF (II) up to 18	47115	1,3%	4,3%
SPF (III) up to 24	59854	1,6%	4,5%
Household with children less than 16	1050392	28,7%	79,8%
Household with children less than 18	1090007	29,7%	82,8%
Household with dependent children	1316759	35,9%	100,0%
Total household	3664392	100%	-

Table: household categories

The percentage of SPFs in relation to households with children is around 4,25% as we can observe in table 1. The first category of SPF –SPF (I) - with dependent children up to 16 years represents 4% of families with children. The most extended category – SPF

(III), up to 24 years if the children are inactive- represents 4.5% of all the families. These types of household represent around 1.4% of the total households. These percentages are quite low by comparison with the other European Union countries. Indeed, they are around half of the average of the EU-15.

It should be underlined that the aforementioned definitions exclude SPFs who do not live alone with their dependent children. SPFs who are hosted by a household are not taken into account. By consequence, the number of SPF is underestimated as social phenomena in the above figures. Furthermore, recomposed-families are also not taken into account. The above definition specified that just one adult lives in the household. It gives us a picture but it offers no information about the “recomposed family”.

3.1.2. Marital status, age and gender of the parent of the SPF

The category of the SPF is not a homogeneous one. It does not consist of people experiencing the same social situation as it is reflected by the below table.

SPF			
Marital status of the head of the household in SPF	Male	Female	Total
Married	0,0%**	6,7%**	6,5%**
Separated	39,9%**	22,5%**	23,1%**
Unmarried	0,0%**	3,2%**	3,1%*
Divorced	60,1%**	35,6%	36,4%
Widowed	0,0%**	32,1%	31,0%

Nevertheless, it gives clear ideas about the size of the sub-groups. The number of unmarried mothers is quite low (less than 4%) in Greece. Furthermore, it consists of exclusively female heads of household. Married SPFs consist of parents whom one of them is in jail or is severely handicapped and is not considered able to support his/her family. According the Greek law, a Benefit can be granted to “unprotected families” only if the head of the family is a woman. Even if no quantitative data is available on this topic, these two sub-groups may be subject to extreme exclusion and poverty. In fact, their economical situation strongly depends on their social network and family support. The most important group is the divorced, which make up 36,2% of SPFs.

Furthermore, the separated and the divorced make up almost 60% of the totality of SPFs. These reflect the trend of increase in divorce and family conflicts in Greece during the last decade. Each of these two categories is anticipated to increase in the future. However, the number of widowed cannot be neglected with 31% of the parent of SPF. It shows the importance of survivor's insurance.

The average age of heads of SPFs is around 43-45 years. Young parents are not common in Greece and it reflects the facts that births are not frequent for unmarried persons and that the average age of marriage is nowadays 27 years old for women and 29 years old for men.

Age of the head of the family by type of household	SPF	TPF
18-24 years	0,7%**	0,4%**
25-34 years	25,5%*	19,8%
35-44 years	48,6%	43,4%
45-54 years	22,0%*	27,4%
55+ years	3,1%**	9,0%

In that matter, there is no so crucial difference with two parents' families as can be observed in the above table. Heads of SPFs seem to be a little bit younger than heads of the TPF. But this difference can be explain by the fact that SPFs have a specific characteristic with regard to the gender of the head of the SPF. More than 90% of them are female. This may partly reflect that courts do no let children to father and, as a custom, appoint custody to their mother. It would be interesting to know more about how often (days a week/month) separated or divorced fathers live with their children and how often fathers request custody of their children but we have no information on this.

	Gender of the head of household			% of female
	Male	Female	Total	heads of household
SPF	3110*	39386	42496	92,7%
TPF	979603	70788	1050391	6,7%

3.1.3. Number and age of dependent persons

The number of children per household is lower in SPFs than in TPFs: 1.1 children per household in SPFs and 1,3 children per household in TPFs. The limited number of children per family has obviously an impact on the poverty of each household category. It has also an impact on the social expenditure needed to cover eventually at-risk-of poverty. The age of children in the household is also important. The presence of young children –which mean up to 3 or 6 years old- may obstruct parents from taking up employment. Nevertheless, the number of young children related to the total of children who are present in household of SPF is not so high, as can be observed in the table below.

Age of the children	Number of children in SPF	Number of children in TPF
0-5	13,6%**	36,8%
6-11.	32,1%	35,1%
12-15.	54,3%	28,1%
Total	100,0%	100,0%

More than half of the children of SPF are more than 12 years old. The new “all day school” policy in kindergarten and in primary school may be useful in helping parents enter the labour market. This policy -“all day school”- is not applied at the secondary school.

3.1.4. Types of household, income and poverty

In the table below, the two household types have been divided in three levels of income. The first category includes households which are below the at-risk of poverty level. Households with more than 2.5 times the poverty line have been regrouped in the third level of income. It could be expected that SPF are more hit by poverty than other

households, as it is likely that they would have less work density, so less income from employment, than two parent families. Nevertheless, the percentage of households earning between the at-risk-of-poverty income line and 2.5 times higher this at-risk-of-poverty income line (so the second category of income) is almost the same. As can be observed, in the table below, this percentage is 55.5% for SPFs and 55,0% for TPFs.

Income brackets	SPF	TPF
0-4 741 euros	34,4%	20,4%
4 741-11 853 euros	55,5%	55,0%
11852+ euros	10,1%**	24,6%

In other words, the SPF can't be view as an homogeneous category with regard to their income level. As well as in TPF, the majority of the SPF get an income in a specific bracket. It could be that TPFs include just one breadwinner and, by consequence, are not especially richer than SPFs where the parent is employed. Furthermore, couples with low income avoid getting children. However, it must be underlined that the poverty rate of SPFs—see definition of poverty threshold in annex- with dependent child up to 16 years old is higher than for TPFs. It concerns families with no employment and no extended family support. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the percentage of poor SPF would be higher if part of them would not have been hosted in other family structure, as is the case when a mother and her children are hosted by her parents.

Finally, the table below shows that the SPFs have not seen their standard of living being improved as often as that of TPFs. This is especially true for non poor SPFs in comparison to non poor TPFs.

	SPF_16			TPF_16		
	Non poor	Poor	Total	Non poor	Poor	Total
Has been at least little improved	10,9%**	5,8%**	9,2%**	22,4%	7,3%	19,3%
Is the same	33,0%*	38,6%**	34,9%*	35,0%	34,4%	34,9%
Has been at least a little deteriorated	56,1%	55,5%**	55,9%	42,6%	58,3%	45,8%

3.1.5. Poverty Depth of SPF

The poverty depth shows how poor are the poor. It is addressed by stressing different kinds of poverty lines. In this paper, the poverty line is taken as the income level which represents 50% of the traditional poverty threshold (so 50% of 60% of the median of income), as we can see in the below table. So, what is measured is how many persons are still at risk of poverty if the level of the poverty line is diminished.

Levels of poverty line	Poverty Depth	SPF	TPF
4741	100%	34,4%*	20,4%
2370	50%	21,1%**	9,6%

As has been noticed above, the SPFs at-risk-of poverty are higher than TPFs. It is interesting to point out that 21,1% of the total poor SPFs (so below the 60% of the median) are still poor below the poverty line which represents 50% of the poverty line of reference (around 2370 euros a year in 2002).

3.1.6. Living conditions of SPFs

The SILC data base let us know about some living conditions of household types. It permits us to see if some household types suffer from some specific deprivation, examining the possession of some items, nutrition practice, health consideration and ability to afford holidays.

The table below, which presents the percentage of household in SPFs and in TPFs which possess phone, TV, Computer wash machine and car, shows that almost every household –poor or non poor- is in fact equipped with a phone, TV or washing machine. The percentage of equipped households in these items is almost 100%. Poor SPF are a little bit more deprived. Still, the percentage of equipped households is high.

Around 40% of the household types possess a computer. The SPFs are slightly better equipped than TPFs. Differences between poor and non poor are clear and especially for TPFs. Just 26% of SPFs and 15% of TPFs who are poor possess a computer. The most

important difference between the two household types concerns car possession. TPFs are definitively better equipped than SPFs

	SPF			TPF		
	Non poor	Poor	Total	Non poor	Poor	Total
Phone (mobile or not)	100%	100%*	100%	100%	98%	99%
TV	100%	100%*	100%	100%	98%	99%
Computer	51%	26%**	42%	43%	15%	38%
Wash machine	98%	86%*	94%	99%	94%	98%
Car	64%	51%**	60%	91%	77%	88%

The table below presents the answers to the question “do you eat meat, chicken or fish twice a week?”. The negative answers are higher in SPFs than in TPFs, especially for poor categories.

	SPF			TPF		
	Non poor	Poor	Total	Non poor	Poor	Total
Yes	92,0%	69,0%*	84,1%	94,1%	77,9%	90,8%
No	8,0%**	31,0%**	15,9%**	5,9%	22,1%	9,2%

Differences are clearer if we analyze the health of the head of household. As has been described above, the age of the head varies a lot between SPF and TPF. So, it is expected that differences in health conditions reflect the living conditions. As can be seen in the table below the number of heads who describe their health as “at least good” is almost the same in TPFs and SPFs as long as non poor are concerned. It represents almost 92% of the heads. The table also shows that overall, SPFs have more health problems than TPFs. This is explained by differences among the poor. More poor heads of SPFs describe their health as “average” or “bad or very bad”. The poor in SPFs seem to have more health problems than the poor in TPFs.

	SPF			TPF		
	Non Poor	Poor	Total	Non Poor	Poor	Total
					85,6	90,4
At least Good	91,8%	76,2%*	86,4%	91,7%	%	%
		15,7%*	10,8%*			
Average	8,2%**	*	*	5,8%	8,7%	6,4%
Bad or very bad	0,0%**	8,2%**	2,8%**	2,5%	5,7%	3,1%

3.1.7. Access to social services and SPFs

The table below illustrates the various sources of economic help directed to the families according to the type of household.

	SPF			TPF		
	Non poor	Poor	Total	Non poor	Poor	Total
Private acquaintance and family	94,4%	84,8%*	91,3%	93,8%	%	93,7%
		15,2%*	4,9%*			
Public services	0,0%**	*	*	2,5%	3,3%	2,7%
			3,8%*			
Others	5,6%**	0,0%**	*	3,7%	3,6%	3,7%
		41,7%*			56,0	59,7
It wasn't necessary to ask	38,7%*	*	39,7%	60,6%	%	%

It is clear that SPFs need economic support more often than TPFs. Around 40% of the TPFs ask for economic help and 60% of the SPFs do the same. In case of need, people ask, first of all, family and friend for support. The public services (social and health services) and others (politicians, municipalities) are asked just by less than 8.7% and 6.4% of SPFs and TPFs respectively who declared the need of economical help. These figures show that the “social support system” is mainly constituted by family and friend support for all kind of household types.

Furthermore, 2.04% of SPFs and 0.7% of TPFs answer yes to the question “Has our household received any social welfare form the State in 2002 ?” The table below describes the need for household to ask for social help (information, protection, juridical assistance). 48% of SPFs didn’t need to ask for social help and 62% of TPFs. So, it is clear that SPFs need social help more often than TPFs. Among those who need help, around 83-87% ask acquaintances and friends for help and just 17-13% public services and others.

	SPF			TPF		
	Non poor	Poor	Total	Non poor	Poor	Total
Private acquaintance and family	84,6%	80,6%*	83,1%	87,8%	83,3%	86,8%
Public services	13,1%**	19,4%**	15,6%**	9,4%	14,4%	10,5%
Others	2,2%**	0,0%**	1,4%**	2,8%	2,4%	2,7%
It wasn't necessary to ask	51,9%*	40,1%**	47,9%	62,8%	61,2%	62,4%

This shows that the main social help received comes from private support.

3.1.8. Education and income of the head of the SPF

The level of education of the head of household –mainly a woman in case of a SPF and mainly a man in case of a TPF- has been divided in three levels. The first one, “lower level of education”, includes persons from the lowest up to the lower secondary school (gymnasium). The intermediate level comprises various types of higher secondary school (lyceum) and post-secondary vocational training institutes. Finally, the higher level, “higher level of education”, includes the tertiary level of education (graduate, master and PhD) both universities and technological educational institutions.

The table below shows that there is one fundamental difference between SPFs and TPFs with regard to level of education. The level of education of the head of SPFs is higher than that of the head of TPFs. It is especially clear about the low level of education category. This could reflect the fact that divorce is more frequent for people with a high level of education in Greece.

	SPF	TPF
Lower Level of Education	16,8%**	31,3%
Intermediate level of Education	55,2%	46,6%
Higher level of Education	28,0%*	22,1%

However, there is an interesting difference between SPFs and TPFs. The poverty rate is strongly related with the level of education in the Greek society as a whole. Indeed, this phenomenon is clearly observed in the case of TPFs. The poverty rate for TPFs is almost 5% for the higher level of education and is almost 40% for the lower level of education. In the SPFs case, the poverty rate is three times higher than the poverty rate in TPFs for the higher level of education and it is more than two times higher (33,2% and 15,2% respectively). The heads of TPFs with a high level of education are usually working and thus, protect their family from poverty. This does not appear to be the case for SPFs. The head of the family –most of the time a women- may be looking for employment without success or be constrained by his/her children in her attempts to enter the labour market.

	Poverty rate	
	SPF	TPF
Lower Level of Education	65,3%	39,0%
Intermediate level of Education	33,2%	15,2%
Higher level of Education	18,3%	5,2%
Total	34,4%	20,4%

3.1.9. Employment situation and SPFs

The employment situation of the two household types has been split in three categories: employed, unemployed, non active. The employment situation of the head of household

is quite different between SPFs and TPFs. Unemployed and inactive are more often observed in the case of SPFs than in the case of TPFs.

Employment situation of the head of household	SPF	TPF
	Employed	75,7%
Unemployed	8,6%**	2,6%
Non active	15,7%**	9,2%

As we notice in the table below, over 19% of TPFs are at-risk of poverty even if the head of household is employed. The percentage is higher for SPFs. Nevertheless, the most important aspect is the very high poverty rate in the case of heads of family being unemployed for both household types, SPFs and TPFs, but especially for SPFs (80.2% and 33.5% respectively). It seems that unemployment leads to poverty. As we have seen above the welfare state does not protect so much people against social risk. Additionally, non activity (retirement etc.) is related with high risk of poverty in both household types and especially for SPFs (respectively 45,3% and 27,4%).

Employment situation of the head of household	Poverty rate Household)	
	SPF	TPF
Employed	26,9%	19,3%
Unemployed	80,2%**	33,5%
Non active	45,3%**	27,4%
Total	34,4%	20,4%

In the later case, it would be interesting to investigate whether the family support network is a substitute to low welfare state intervention. In any case, a “make work pay” policy could be justified. Employed people with children are still poor even if they are employed.

3.1.10. Part-time and full-time work of heads of households in SPFs

The relation of part or full time employment of the head of household to poverty is examined in the table below. As the table shows, part timer heads of household are more at risk of poverty than full timers. 58% and 34,8% of the households in SPFs and TPFs respectively, where the head of household is working part time, are at poverty risk. This is more than double of the full employment situation. Nevertheless, the absolute number of part timers in both cases is relatively low. These specific populations could be especially targeted by a ‘make work pay’ policies.

Employment type of the Responsible	Poverty rate Household)	
	SPF	TPF
Part-time employment	58,0%**	34,8%
Full-time employment	23,1%**	17,8%
Total employed	26,7%	18,7%

CHAPTER 4: NATIONAL POLICIES TO COMBAT POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN GREECE

4.1. *Single Parents*

Traditionally, Single Parent Families (SPFs) in Greece have never been an effective pressure group able to influence the decision making bodies in view of improving their situation. By contrast, the associations of large families have been much more effective in lobbying in favour of their members and in extracting overtime a significant number of cash and non-cash benefits. Thus, most institutional changes affecting SPFs have been the outcome of a “top-down” approach, triggered off by forward looking legislators and policy makers.

4.2. *Legislative provisions regarding single parent families in Greece*

- The family law provisions voted in 1983 abolished all discriminations against children born out of wedlock and fully equated them with children born in wedlock;
- the provisions regarding paternal authority and minor's custody in case of a family break up are spelled out in articles 1513 & 1514 of the Civil Code: in case of separation, divorce or annulment of the marriage, the so-called "parental care" is decided by the court as following: i) it can be given to one of the parents (usually the mother), or to both parents, if they agree thereupon; in the latter case, the judgment defines the place of residence of the child as well; ii) it can be shared between the parents (functional or time share) and iii) it can be given to a third person (a custodian). In order to attain its judgment, the court takes into consideration: a) the bonds of the child with its parents and brothers/sisters till that moment and b) eventual agreements of the parents on the care of the person and the administration of the estate of the child. The parent who has not been given the parental care has the right to be informed by the other parent on the person and the estate of the child;
- the parental care of the child who was *born out of wedlock* and has not yet been acknowledged by its father, belongs to the mother. If the father acknowledges the child –always with the mother’s consent- he has a right to parental care but can exercise it only if the parental care of the mother has ceased (e.g. because of death) or if she is incapable to exercise it (e.g. chronic illness or invalidity).

Upon petition of the father, the court can give him the parental care -in the whole or in part- in every other occasion and, in particular, if the mother agrees, when this is in the best interest of the child. In the case of judicial acknowledgment of the child, in which the father took part as a rival party, he does not exercise the parental care nor does he replace the mother in its exercise. Upon petition of the father, the court can decide in a different way, if this is imposed by the best interest of the child, in case the parental care of the mother has ceased or she is incapable to exercise it or upon agreement of both parents. [Art.1515 Greek Civil Code];

- the Supreme Personnel Recruitment Council (ASEP) gives priority in public sector recruitment to candidates who are single parents and have the custody of their children.

4.3. Services provided to Single Parent Families and their children

There is a wide range of services provided to children and families, irrespective of whether they are single parent or two parent. These services are offered both by public and private non-profit institutions and they often overlap. Families are usually unaware of the services provided and in case of a problem they have recourse to expensive private services or, if they cannot afford it, they do nothing to address their problems.

(a) Learning difficulties

- Centre for Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support (KDAY- Ministry of Education)

(b) Mental health problems

- Centre for Mental Health and Research (KEPSEA)
- Centre for Mental Health
- Research University Institute for Mental Health (EIPSY)

(c) Welfare services

- Institute of Social Protection and Solidarity (IKPA).
- Prefectures – Social Welfare Departments
- Municipality Social Service Departments

(d) Counselling – support services

- Centre for Family and Child Care (KMOP)
- Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family
- Institute for Child's Health (IYP).
- SOS telephone help – line for adolescents and their families run by the Society for the Psycho-social Health of Children and Adolescents (EPSYPE)
- Citizens' Ombudsman /Children's Rights Department

(e) Information, documentation services and lobbying for SPFs

- Research Centre for Equality Issues (KETHI)
- Single Parents' Association

4.4. Poverty

It should be stressed that cash benefits and social transfers in general in Greece are far from being generous and offer little effective support. The income threshold in order to qualify for these benefits is also extremely low, thus excluding from the safety net large sections of the less privileged population. In addition, both benefits and thresholds are not being regularly reviewed and brought into line with the prevailing cost of living.

- “allowance for unprotected children”: children up to 16 years of age that are orphans from both parents or their father, children without the paternal protection (in case the father has abandoned them, is sick, imprisoned or serving in the armed forces) and children born out of wedlock are entitled a means tested benefit, awarded by the prefecture welfare authorities (law 4051/1960).¹⁷ Each child is entitled €44,02 per month, provided the monthly family income does not exceed € 234,78 for a 3-member family (+€20,54 for every additional member). This allowance was received by 24.785 children in 2004. The amount and the thresholds remain unchanged since 1997. The aim is to increase the number of beneficiaries to 45.000;
- a monthly benefit to SPFs that are facing serious socio-economic problems is awarded by the Social Care Unit of Penteli (€ 105,68 for families with one child and € 148,2 for families with 2 or more children);

¹⁷ Fathers who are heads of single parent families are excluded from this programme. The Citizen's Ombudsman has pointed out that this provision discriminates against fathers and is out of line with the prevailing family law.

- “orphan’s pension”: it is awarded to children less than 18 years of age (or 24, if they are students) either by the Social Security Foundation (IKA-ETAM- 5 571 beneficiaries in 2004), or by the Organisation for Agriculture Insurances (OGA- 1538 beneficiaries in 2004);
- an allowance addressed to low income families (including SPFs), living permanently in mountainous and disadvantaged areas, or that have minor children. In order to qualify for this benefit, the annual family income must not exceed € 2500. The allowance varies between € 300 and € 600 per annum and was received by 43.194 beneficiaries in 2004;
- a school allowance of € 300 per annum addressed to low income families earning less than € 3000 annually with children in compulsory education. This benefit was received by 25.397 individuals in 2004;
- uninsured employed women that are pregnant are entitled to a one-off maternity benefit of € 440, provided their monthly income does not exceed € 587;¹⁸
- single parents (unwed) are also entitled a family allowance (like married employees) paid by their employer, until their child is 18 years old, or 24 years old if a student.

4.5. Social exclusion

Despite the fact that in Greece, SPFs are amongst the most vulnerable groups in terms of poverty and social exclusion¹⁹, and thus constitute an invisible and latent pool of social exclusion, public policies do not effectively address the multiple problems faced by SPFs. This may be attributed to the low incidence of SPFs in the total population: single parents households constitute only a small minority of all households (2%) and of households with children (4%); cultural and ideological factors (the traditional two-parent family viewed as the only “legitimate” form of family formation) have also played a key role in keeping the issue of SPFs at the margins of social policies. However, in recent years, changing social realities and attitudes are gradually being reflected in policy measures to combat social exclusion, with explicit references being now made to the SPFs that have become one of the several target groups. For example, in the new programming period 2006-2008 of the National Action Plan for Social

¹⁸ Only 634 women were eligible for this benefit in 2004.

¹⁹ 28.8% of single parent households are at risk of poverty, as opposed to 20.5% for the total population, whilst the poverty rate of single parent households is 34.4%, significantly higher than that of two-parent households which is 20.4% (EU-SILC data, 2004).

Inclusion, there are special programmes targeted specifically to single parent families that are at risk of social exclusion. Nonetheless, it remains, that the main focus of policies to combat social exclusion is to minimize the barriers for access to paid employment and to support the most vulnerable groups.

- Social Care Units: around 700 unprotected children deprived of family support were hosted at these Units in 2003 and 2004. During the new programming period 2006 – 2008, efforts will concentrate on the upgrading and further expansion of pre-school care units, of extended operation hours schools, of Centres for Children’s Creative Activity, as well as of the Social Care Units, in order to enable parents (especially women) to participate in paid employment. Moreover, the extension of certain kinder-gardens’ operation hours will facilitate working parents with long or unconventional working time schedules;
- babies and mothers’ protection services: special decentralised units provide psychological and financial support services to single mothers and their babies, until the mothers become able to support themselves. During the period 2003-2004, the Baby’s Centre “Mitera” hosted 106 children. “Mitera” also provides legal and counselling services to single parents that are facing a crisis situation;
- the Counselling and Information Centres of the Centre of Research on Gender Issues operating in 5 cities provide legal, counselling and psychological support to women heads of single parent households;
- the National Centre for Social Solidarity co-ordinates counselling, information and mediation services provided to individuals and families in an emergency situation, including SPFs;
- single parents who comply with the eligibility criteria set by the Organisation of Employees’ Housing (OEK) are entitled a housing loan on beneficial terms or an annual rent benefit of € 1.680. Moreover, every year four houses are allocated to single mothers that are facing severe social and economic hardship;
- a “Home-Start” programme is introduced in view of helping low income families with children aged less than 5 years facing difficulties, with practical assistance and home help;
- low income SPFs are entitled free medical and hospital care for a 3-year period, following the ministerial decree issued in 2005 providing access to free health care to the uninsured and economically vulnerable citizens.

4.6. Policy

There are very few policy measures explicitly addressed to single parent families and their children. These fall into three broad categories:

- (a) measures addressed to single mothers, in view of helping them to overcome a crisis;
- (b) means tested cash benefits to improve living conditions;
- (c) benefits and allowances addressed to working parents.

However, other welfare policies, not specifically targeted to single parent families but to families in need of support (e.g. low income families, large families, families living in remote areas, etc.), may have a positive impact in addressing poverty and social exclusion problems of SPFs as well.

Broader policies, implicitly affecting children and Single Parent Families include:

⇒ **taxation policies**: alleviation of tax burden for families with children (universal policy). The tax discount rate increases depending on the number of dependent children (€ 1000 for every child).

⇒ **non-cash benefits**

- in the public sector, improved working hours arrangements for single mothers and widows employees have been introduced. Special initiatives targeted to jobless households are also previewed;
- an unpaid leave for illness of dependent family members is provided in both the private and the public sector, to parents who have children born in or out of wedlock or adopted, under 16 years - without age limit if they need special care, due to serious or chronic illness or invalidity-, provided they are under the parent's custody;
- following the terms of the National General Collective Labour Agreement concluded in 2002, single parents employed in the private sector are entitled to an additional 6 days of paid leave;

- children from single parent families have priority in joining a state or municipal kindergarten. Additionally, if the family annual income is below € 15.000, the single parent is exempt from paying any tuition fees;
- free childcare services: the Organisation of Workers' Hearth (Ergatiki Estia) operates 22 kindergarten schools with 1.300 babies and toddlers, accepted on the basis of income and family situation criteria;
- single parents in custody of 3 minor and unmarried children are entitled the same rights as the heads of large families with more than 4 children.

⇒ *pension rights for single parents*

- the widow of a public sector employee is entitled to a pension, if her husband was already eligible for pension, or if he died in service, after having completed 5 years of service;
- widows, divorced and single mothers recruited in the public sector before 31-12-1982 with unmarried children are eligible for pension after 17 ½ years of real service. Mothers with more than 3 children (or men with over 3 children who have their custody) are entitled to a pension after 20 years of service;
- in the private sector, a widow is entitled to a pension provided that the marriage has lasted for over 2 years and that the widow is over 40 years of age. If the widow is employed, s/he is entitled to 50% of the pension. Unmarried or minor children also are entitled to 25% of the pension;
- all mothers insured at IKA (the Social Security Foundation) can add one year for the first child (1 ½ for the second child and 2 years for the third child) to their pensionable years.

4.7. The National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPIncl)

The NAPIncl is the policy tool that codifies all social policy measures. The support of SPF falls under the broader category of family support policies, with few measures targeted especially towards SPF. The *NAPIncl 2005-2006* had three main policy aims, regarding the support of the family:

(a) combating child poverty and supporting children that are in a disadvantaged social and economic situation;

- (b) increasing and modernising the social care units (state nurseries and kindergartens, all-day schools, provisional hostels for vulnerable groups, etc.);
- (c) introducing a new institutional framework for the support of low income families and of large families. Measures include the new tax regulations, zero-interest rates for housing loans to families with over 3 children, and an increase in the family benefit awarded by the public employment services (OAED).

The *NAPIncl 2006-2008* presented in September 2006 continues on the same line as its predecessor and places great emphasis on improving the environment for the promotion of employment, as the best means to avoid the poverty trap. Its main policy priorities include:

- (a) enhancing employment opportunities, especially for women, young people, the long-term unemployed and the vulnerable sections of the population;
- (b) addressing the disadvantaged position of groups and individuals with respect to education and training;
- (c) support of the family and the elderly;
- (d) social inclusion for disabled persons, immigrants and individuals with cultural/religious particularities; and
- (e) better governance.

4.8. Educational Policy in Greece

The Greek education system can be described as primarily public (according to Dimaras (1995), 95% of the pupil population attend public schools, and only 5% attend private schools²⁰). The system is highly centralised and controlled by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. The Ministry (and its affiliated institutes, the Pedagogical Institute and the Centre for Educational Research), is the sole authority for the planning and implementation of educational policy. This means that the Ministry of Education sets guidelines on all important education issues.

Educational policy in Greece does not address single parent families in any specific or targeted way. There are no particular educational or schooling policy provisions for

²⁰ Dimaras, A. 1995, "Ta Oria tis Metarrhythmis" in A.Kazamias and M.Kassotakis (eds) *Greek Education: Perspectives for reconstruction and modernisation*, Athens, Seirios, pp. 73-83 (Δημαράς, Α. 1995, "Τα Όρια της Μεταρρύθμισης" στο Καζαμιάς, Α και Μ. Κασσωτάκης (επιμ) *Ελληνική Εκπαίδευση: προοπτικές εκπαίδευσης και Εκσυγχρονισμού*, Αθήνα, Εκδόσεις Σείριος, σσ 73-83).

children of single parent families, nor are there specific directives from the Greek Ministry of Education regarding these students as a specific population whose needs ought to be addressed in particular ways. Additionally, there is no system of data collection in schools indicating children's family status, so any knowledge on children's family and/or home situation tends to be informal, and either volunteered by the parents (more frequently) or the child (more infrequently), or some times the result of hearsay in the school.

Additionally, there is no formal educational support or in school services addressing children's educational abilities and achievements or emotional and psychological wellbeing, regardless of family status, nor is there any formal systematic training or official guidelines provided to teachers and other school staff concerning such issues. Educational policy should be reformed, in order to provide for the need for in-school resident relevant professionals (educational and child psychologists as well as social workers) who would be able to provide the necessary and adequately qualified support to children exhibiting either learning difficulties or emotional or behavioural problems. The official incorporation of such professions into the school system by the ministry, and the mandatory staffing of schools with them is a necessity if schools are to fully cater for their students' complex needs.

The lack of controlling and evaluating mechanisms for the assessment of policy; the lack of infrastructure (development of databases, proper statistical indicators, benchmarks etc); the limited co-ordination between Ministries; as well as the lack of relevant high-quality research, all constitute, however, barriers to the development of educational policy appropriately targeted to single parent families and their needs. All these factors call for the modernization of social administration structures, as the existing policy culture does not favour the implementation and assessment of specifically targeted and highly 'technical' policies.

Furthermore, as has been argued by Kazamias and Kassotakis (1995)²¹, the centralisation of the education system hampers the development of "a social

²¹ Kazamias, A and M. Kassotakis, 1995, "Ekpaideytiko Manifesto" in A.Kazamias and M. Kassotakis (eds) *Greek Education: Perspectives for reconstruction and modernisation*, Athens, Seirios, pp. 12-39 (Καζαμιάς, Α και Μ. Κασσωτάκης, 1995 "Εκπαιδευτικό Μανιφέστο", στο Καζαμιάς, Α και Μ. Κασσωτάκης (επιμ) *Ελληνική Εκπαίδευση: προοπτικές εκπαίδευσης και Εκσυγχρονισμού*, Αθήνα, Εκδόσεις Σείριος, σσ 12-39)

partnership” in which schoolteachers and parents’ associations would contribute to the development of educational policy, something which is also related to the underdevelopment/under-representation of “civil society” in Greece.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section is based on the analysis of the empirical research data drawn from the interviews and focus group discussions held with professionals, teachers, children and parents. The perspective of each group on the issues raised in the empirical research is given separately, in order to point out differences and similarities in their approach, but also to highlight in particular the views and experiences of children living in single parent families.

For the sake of our analysis, it would be useful to point out that our sample consisted of four broad categories of children from SPFs:

- (a) children whose parents have divorced and who have a regular contact with the non-resident parent;
- (b) children whose parents have divorced or separated and who see the non-resident parent very erratically;
- (c) children that are orphans from one parent and whose living parent has not re-married; and
- (d) children born out of wedlock, living with a single mother, and having no or very little contact with their father.²²

As the sample was too small to be able to draw any firm conclusions for each subgroup, the analysis of the research findings is based on the total number of children interviewed. There emerge, however, some clear differences that will be presented in the concluding section.

5.1.1. Professionals' perspective

A total of 16 interviews were carried out, mostly between March and September 2006, with a variety of professionals (primarily social workers and psychologists / counsellors) engaged in several ways in the provision of services to children of single parent families. An interview was also taken from the President of the Single Parents' Association. It should be pointed out that the children of SPF constitute just one of several categories of children who are covered by the services provided.

²² There exist two sub-categories of children born out of wedlock: those whose father has acknowledged them, and those whose father has not acknowledged them.

The professionals interviewed represented the following institutions, public or non-profit²³:

1. Centre for Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support (KDAY).
 2. Centre for Family and Child Care (KMOP).
 3. Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family.
 4. Institute of Social Protection and Solidarity (IKPA).
 5. Institute for Child's Health (IYP).
 6. Prefecture of Athens – Social Welfare Department / Central Section
 7. Prefecture of Eastern Attica – Social Welfare Department.
 8. Municipality of Aghia Varvara – Social Service Department
 9. Research Centre for Equality Issues (KETHI)
 10. Centre for Mental Health and Research (KEPSEA)
 11. Centre for Mental Health
 12. Single Parents' Association
- **Definition of SPF:** all those interviewed (teachers, social workers, psychologists and counselors) agreed that the term SPF covers all categories of single parent family, i.e. divorced / separated, widowed, single mother. However, the spontaneous reaction of many was to think mostly of a divorced or separated parent who lives with her/his child or children. Moreover, some of the services visited cover the needs only of special sub-categories of SPF (e.g. families living on or below the poverty line, or single parents (usually mothers) and their children who had been abandoned by their partners/spouses).
 - **Particular problems encountered by children of SPF:** professionals agree that there is a variety of factors that account for the problems that children of SPF may be facing, in terms of introverted or aggressive behaviour, low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity, resentment or rejection, psychological and cognitive maladjustment in the school and social environment and other similar issues.

²³ For a detailed account of their activities, see Annexe.

A most common problem is the poor communication between the two parents or the confrontations that arise between the parents that are about to or have recently divorced. Tensions and hostility often persist also after the divorce, for a variety of reasons which pertain solely to the relationship between the adults but clearly influence the lives and emotional equilibrium of the children. The emotional strain between the parents causes confusion to their children. The physical and symbolic absence of the father (as is most often the case, according to the experience of the professionals, or the mother, as is less often the case) and the lack of communication create feelings of inferiority to the child, who tends to blame the absent parent for all his/her troubles but who also internalises this blame and psychologically may be feeling it as its own failing. In addition, the lack of a male model may, according to the professionals, lead to lack of discipline in the upbringing of children of SPFs and increase self-destructive practices; children living in SPFs often know fewer limits in their behaviour and the lone parent can easily lose control over the child.

A variety of individual behaviours have been reported by the professionals. Some single parents are more concerned in expressing their anger against their former partner and neglect their children; others have to leave them unattended in order to go to work; another parent maybe alcoholic or mentally distressed; the use of violence against the child is not uncommon. Quite often, single parents get easily cross with their children. Some women single parents feel socially rejected and they strive to prove that they can face up to the difficulties of being a single parent. Practical difficulties are greater in SPFs than in TPFs, especially regarding childcare, transportation, household chores and household errands, etc. Single parents often feel lonely and over-burdened but may feel that they are not entitled to help or may be embarrassed to ask for help. Children can be melancholic or hyper-active. They often feel a sentimental void, which their parents strive to fill by acquiring consumer goods, even if they cannot afford them.

However, it is not necessarily the case that children of SPF will be facing psychological or adjustment problems purely because of their family situation; a SPF is not associated by definition, by the professionals, with traumatic or dramatic experiences. In TPFs children may be facing more severe problems,

depending on the circumstances. In the case of divorced parents, if the separation process has been smooth, children adjust fairly easily to their new situation. Having said this, it appears that –by far- the most important factor responsible for the problems that children of SPF maybe facing is the financial situation of the family. The disposable household income is very low if the single parent is unemployed, or on casual work, and if the absent parent does not participate in the maintenance fees, which appears to be the case relatively frequently. Older children often have to work after school, to make ends meet. The poor financial situation –that can some times even take the form of subsistence and malnutrition problems and the lack of elementary hygiene services, or of an overall “environmental regression”- is responsible for poor housing conditions, for educational under-achievement, for family tensions at home, and for very low consumer expenditure capacities. Quite often, according to the professionals, children hold their parents responsible for their bad financial situation. The resulting feeling of social exclusion that is reflected in the lack of social contacts and the non participation in various social activities is then reflected on and shared by the whole SPF and not just the children who are the immediate recipients of this social and educational exclusion. However, according to the professionals interviewed, this sometimes self-imposed social exclusion should not be confused with the social stigma that accompanied in the past many SPFs.

- **Educational problems:** it is hard to distinguish whether children of SPF have learning difficulties, poor school performance and adjustment problems more often than children of two-parent families (TPF). Usually learning difficulties are the outcome of a combination of factors. Economic hardship and deprivation is often associated with learning difficulties, as some children may even have problems to cover their basic school expenses; many children in deprived areas cannot rely on an adult to help them with their homework, or get extra tuition. Family tensions also can result into learning difficulties and offensive behaviour. The same is true for adjustment problems faced by certain children. Significantly, some teachers are inclined to attribute any learning difficulties of children from SPF to their family situation, rather than investigate the roots of the problem (e.g poverty, lack of support, low educational level of parents, etc.).

- **Discrimination from peers, neighbours, teachers, etc.:** a very interesting point that came out from the interviews is that even in the less privileged areas, there seem to be very little or no discrimination against children of SPFs from other children and their families. Very few cases of rejection have been reported. It appears that, at least in large cities, divorce is quite common and the number of SPFs is steadily growing. Some times there is discrimination from peers (e.g. use of aggressive language, especially against children born outside of marriage, or orphans), or other children might feel sorry about children not having one parent, but it is quite rare. Those children that do face (or feel that they face) discrimination, have difficulty in expressing their reaction verbally and use more implicit forms of reaction (for example, some children choose to isolate themselves from their peers, others become aggressive). Teachers, in particular, are usually very sensitive towards children of SPF and show greater understanding than with other children in their class. Exceptions, however, have been mentioned.

5.1. 2. Summary

- All those interviewed (teachers, social workers, psychologists and counselors) agreed that the term SPF covers all categories of single parent family, i.e. divorced / separated, widowed, single mother. However, the spontaneous reaction of many was to think mostly of a divorced or separated parent who lives with her/his child or children.
- Professionals agree that there is a variety of factors that account for the problems that children of SPF may be facing, in terms of introverted or aggressive behaviour, low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity, resentment or rejection, psychological and cognitive maladjustment in the school and social environment and other similar issues. A most common problem is the poor communication between the two parents or the confrontations that arise between the parents that are about to or have recently divorced. However, it is not necessarily the case that children of SPF will be facing psychological or adjustment problems purely because of their family situation; a SPF is not associated by definition, by the professionals, with traumatic or dramatic experiences. In TPFs children may be facing more severe problems, depending on the circumstances. In the case of divorced parents, if the separation process has been smooth, children adjust

fairly easily to their new situation. Having said this, it appears that –by far- the most important factor responsible for the problems that children of SPF maybe facing is the *financial situation* of the family.

- A very interesting point that came out from the interviews is that even in the less privileged areas, there seem to be very little or no discrimination against children of SPFs from other children and their families, as divorce is quite common and the number of SPFs is steadily growing. Some times there is discrimination from peers (e.g. use of aggressive language, especially against children born outside of marriage, or orphans), or other children might feel sorry about children not having one parent, but it is quite rare. Those children that feel they face discrimination, have difficulty in expressing their reaction verbally and use more implicit forms of reaction (for example, some children isolate themselves from their peers, others become aggressive).

5.2. Teachers' perspective

Individual interviews were taken from 5 teachers in total: 3 teachers teach in elementary schools and 2 in secondary schools; 3 of the schools visited were in one of the most deprived areas of Attica (Perama) and one school was the Experimental Elementary School affiliated to the University of Athens, situated in the centre of Athens (Kolonaki), attracting students from all over the city.

- **Definition of a SPF:** in addition to the usual categories of SPF, in Perama, there are families who have become single parent because the father is in jail, there are cases where the father has two parallel families with children of the same age, and there also exist families without parents, as some children have been abandoned by both parents and live with their grandparents.
- **Perceptions of children and their families:** in Perama, teachers reported that children from SPFs have a more aggressive attitude, often have symptoms of psycho-somatic illnesses or psychological problems and usually are late at school. Some are victims of abuse. To address these problems, the school authorities get in touch with the parent who is in charge of the child, and try to help. However, some parents –owing to deprivation- are not responsive and show a lack of interest towards the problems of their children. This attitude is in line with the overall degraded socio-cultural environment of Perama. By contrast, the Experimental School teacher stressed that there are no differences whatsoever between children from SPFs and those from TPFs, nor is he aware of any prejudices towards children of SPFs.
- **Particular problems encountered by children from SPFs:** in Perama, the children show a distinct lack of ambition, aims and a vision for the future, which is not a characteristic exclusively of SPFs, rather it is the result of the overall poverty and deprivation of the area. Additionally, the children from SPFs usually have difficulties with time management, but also with excessive spending beyond their means. It was suggested by the teachers and professionals that through their consumer behaviour children are trying to compensate for their family situation and to show off to their peers. The lack of a model (in particular of the male model for boys) is salient. These children are more

sensitive and need extra support and tenderness, especially if the child is abandoned by one of the parents. In the Athens school, children from SPFs do not seem to have any particular problems because of their family situation and they seem well integrated into school life; however, the problems maybe carefully hidden, because of the above average educational level of parents who send their children to this school.

- **How does the school community treat these children:** teachers not only do not discriminate against these children, but they show extra care towards them and greater understanding. The other children, also, treat them well. They quarrel and have fights, but without insulting the children from SPFs. Usually, children of SPFs, as long as they do not have serious psychological problems, are quite well integrated into school life. However, one teacher reported that aggressive language (e.g. “bastard”) is being used against children born outside of marriage (called “of unknown father”). In the Experimental School of Athens, belonging to a SPF is not even an issue for either the children or the teachers, and in any event, the staff does not allow such matters to become an issue. Both the father and the mother visit the school to be informed about their child’s progress, and the teachers, in general, are very discreet. However, when it comes to the family stereotypes portrayed in some textbooks, teachers take extra care to emphasise that there also exist other forms of family structures than the traditional ones mentioned in the books.
- **Learning difficulties:** in both areas visited, children from SPFs do not seem to have greater learning difficulties than children from TPFs. In Perama, however, it is the low educational background of parents, exacerbated by poverty, that creates learning difficulties for children and is responsible for their poor school performance, irrespective of their family status. The most frequent problem that students from deprived families face is the lack of guidance and support for their homework; quite often, they lag behind in language use as well. By contrast, in the Experimental School, only one case was reported of a girl from a SPF with school performance problems that were soon overcome.
- **Discrimination problems reported by children and their families:** nothing in particular is reported, as living in a SPF is quite common nowadays.

- **Support for these children and their families:** there is a “special reception class” in every elementary school located in Perama, to help children with learning difficulties to integrate into school. Otherwise, the state institutions offering counseling services are very weak and show a considerable delay to offer advice (especially in the case of more serious learning difficulties); thus the teachers have to provide ad hoc support to the children that need it, even though they are not qualified for this type of assistance. Similarly, teachers are the ones who inform the parents of their rights (e.g. access to a cash benefit, use of services, civic rights for children born outside of marriage, etc.). A request that is being put forward by all teachers and professionals interviewed – including those from the Experimental School of Athens- is to establish a counseling service within the schools, not only for children from SPFs, but for all children and to train teachers how to deal with the problems that arise,. In Perama, there is only one psychologist from the Ministry of Education to cover the needs of students, and two social workers from the local Municipality to cover the needs of the entire population of over 50 000 inhabitants. To a considerable degree, children in need are most effectively supported by an NGO that has been very active in the area for the past 20 years, the Family and Childcare Centre (KMOP). A closer co-operation with parents is also crucial, in view of establishing common objectives and adhering to them; at present, few single parents in Perama are willing to cooperate and get more involved in addressing their children’s needs. As a teacher from Perama has pointed out, the most important thing for the children from deprived families, whether single parent or two parent, is to make them feel that they worth something, that their problems receive some attention.

5.2.2. Summary

- In Perama, teachers reported that children from SPFs have a more aggressive attitude, often have symptoms of psycho-somatic illnesses or psychological problems and usually are late at school. Some are victims of abuse. To address these problems, the school authorities get in touch with the parent who is in charge of the child, and try to help. This is in line with the overall degraded socio-cultural environment of Perama. By contrast, the Experimental School

teacher stressed that there are no differences whatsoever between children from SPFs and those from TPFs.

- In Perama, the children show a distinct lack of ambition, aims and a vision for the future, which is not a characteristic exclusively of SPFs, rather it is the result of the overall poverty and deprivation of the area. Additionally, the children from SPFs usually have difficulties with time management, but also with excessive spending beyond their means. It was suggested by the teachers and professionals that through their consumer behaviour children try to compensate for family situation and hardship. In the Athens school, children from SPFs do not seem to have any particular problems because of their family situation and they seem well integrated into school life.
- Teachers report that not only they do not discriminate against these children, but show extra care towards them and greater understanding. The other children, also, treat them well. They quarrel and have fights, but without insulting the children from SPFs. Usually, children of SPFs, as long as they do not have serious psychological problems, are quite well integrated into school life.
- In both areas visited, children from SPFs do not seem to have greater learning difficulties than children from TPFs. In Perama, however, it is the low educational background of parents, exacerbated by poverty, that creates learning difficulties for children and is responsible for their poor school performance, irrespective of their family status. The most frequent problem that students from deprived families face is the lack of guidance and support for their homework.
- Teachers uniformly report a lack and inadequacy of existing support services (especially in the case of more serious learning difficulties); thus the teachers have to provide ad hoc support to the children that need it, even though they are not qualified for this type of assistance. Similarly, teachers are the ones who inform the parents of their rights (e.g. access to a cash benefit, use of services, civic rights for children born outside of marriage, etc.). A request that is being put forward by all teachers and professionals interviewed –including those from the Experimental School of Athens- is to establish counseling and support services within the schools.

5.3. Recommendations for a better provision of services

The need for drastically improved services to children in difficulty has been stressed by all professionals and teachers. The lack of professional support is evident in many respects.

- (a) *Counseling services* at school or in the community are virtually non-existent and the needs are addressed only erratically and with considerable delay. Children have no one to turn to for advice and support whilst parents are usually reluctant to seek advice but also face the practical problem of lack of appropriate agents and services. All schools should be in the position to offer in-house counseling services, even if only on a part-time basis, by a psychologist, who can see children, as well as parents. Some professionals pointed out that it would be preferable to offer advice to children (and eventually their parents) on neutral grounds outside the school premises, as for many pupils the school is an unattractive place that does not make them feel at ease. Overall, children of SPFs need to be treated with love and understanding by the professionals from whom they seek advice.
- (b) *Financial support*, awarded by the welfare authorities to “unprotected children” in the form of a cash benefit, is extremely inadequate (just over € 44 per month for one child) and only very poor SPFs (earning less than € 235 / month) are eligible for it. Children from very low income families who are in the age group of mandatory schooling (i.e. up to 15 years of age) are also entitled to a “school benefit” of € 300 annually. The introduction of a guaranteed minimum income or the generous increase in cash benefits would minimize the number of those left outside the safety net.
- (c) *Affordable childcare* services are still not widely available for pre-school children; moreover, only employed women have access to them, thus increasing the difficulties for unemployed women to look for a job. Single parents find it increasingly difficult to reconcile their family responsibilities with a paid job. There are no childcare services for women working in the afternoon and on Saturday.

- (d) *Decentralised and better organized social welfare services*, adequately staffed, should be a priority. At present, many densely populated areas are not covered by any social service agencies. State and local government welfare authorities, severely under-staffed, can only address the most critical cases and refer the less severe ones to other authorities. Social workers and psychologists often work under extreme pressure and do not devote as much time as would be necessary to the families requesting support. In addition, red tape procedure prevents the professionals from doing their work properly. A lot more counseling should be offered within the Prefecture welfare services by specialized child psychologists rather than social workers. A social welfare and child protection service should be established within the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity; social workers need to be recruited by the ministries of Education and Justice, so as to ease the burden on the few social workers working at the Prefecture welfare services. Moreover, professionals need continuous training and upgrading of their skills.
- (e) *After-school tuition* for students lagging behind in class has proved extremely effective in reducing the rate of drop-outs and in preventing social exclusion; this initiative should be reinforced and become more widespread.
- (f) *Access to paid employment* for the single parent in charge of the household constitutes the best remedy to the problems of social exclusion experienced by SPFs.
- (g) There is only one hostel in Athens and one in Thessaloniki for SPFs that are in a crisis situation. A programme of council housing could provide *decent housing* for families in crisis.
- (h) The Greek Orthodox Church assists families in need, but sometimes in an unprofessional and moralistic way.
- (i) *Soft social services* can be more effective. For example, preventive services, or a service charged with the solution of practical problems faced by SPFs would be very useful; home assistance would also be valuable.
- (j) *Mediation services* for the relationships between divorced parents and their children and free legal advice have been suggested by a professional.

- (k) The issue of *abused children* needs to be addressed in a much more systematic and effective way: not all professionals offering counseling services are qualified to interfere in such matters.
- (l) *Access to information* regarding the rights of SPFs: the “hear-say system” is at present the most widely used method for having access to basic entitlements
- (m) *Mentoring schemes* involving regular socialisation and activities, especially of male children and teenagers, with men of approved character could aid in the development of appropriate male roles models, according to psychologists and social workers interviewed.

Other suggestions made by the professionals:

- measures that stigmatise children of SPFs should be avoided;
- children’s needs and preferences must be systematically taken into account in the provision of services;
- special support should be provided to single mothers, who constitute 4% of total households;
- the sooner a problem is diagnosed in the early stages of a child’s development, the better it is addressed. Hence, prevention policies can play a crucial role.

5.4. Children's perspective

5.4.1. Family life of children from single parent families

The family structures of the 22 children interviewed²⁴ vary a lot: the most widespread situation was that of divorced parents whose children live with the mother; however, there were also two cases where the children live with their father, one case where they live with the grand-mother, five children with single mothers, and three orphans. Most children whose parents have divorced see the non-resident parent regularly, but three children have no contact at all with the non-resident parent.

Although every child interviewed experienced the fact of living in a SPF in a quite different way, the common thread running through many of the interviews is that children resent the fact that their parents have divorced and feel that life would be better if they lived with both their parents. Not seeing the non-resident parent creates feelings of remorse. Some children expressed their wish for their parents to be together again: *"I would talk to them and ask them not to quarrel about trivial and unimportant things"* said an 11 year-old girl from Perama, whilst others have settled well into their situation and would not like any changes.

When prompted to express their feelings about their family situation, some of the children in the focus group became emotional and were unable to answer. Children from Perama emphasized their parents' mistakes: *"Parents bring children in the world without even thinking. See, my parents have divorced and it is us that have to pay the price for it. (A., girl, aged 14). "The worst thing of all is not to be told the truth. It's worse to hear the truth from a stranger, rather than from your own people."(same).*

Children that have been living a long time with only one parent reported that they have a calm family life, without particular tensions. Even if there are tensions, the ties with the resident parent are very close ("single person attachment"). The presence of the father may imply more discipline for the children, which they resent.²⁵ One girl pointed out how much she likes living in the house with only her mother, without, however,

²⁴ 18 children from SPFs had individual interviews with the research team and 4 children from SPFs participated in the focus group discussion. In addition, 4 children from TPFs participated in another focus group discussion.

²⁵ Some fathers, although non-resident, abuse their children or yell at them because of their poor school performance.

dismissing the presence of a male figure altogether: *“I like it very much that we are only two women at home. There is no male presence, because men’s exuberance annoys me!”* (E., girl, aged 15, suburban Athens). Another girl, whose parents are divorced, pointed out how happy she is about the fact that her parents are in good terms and that *“they are what they are”*, although she would have liked to live closer to her father’s place.

Practical problems are often evoked: they range from simple commuting and time management problems and the absence of “proper” home-made food, to more complicated problems, associated with the lack of money and the absence of the other parent. As a result, some of the children, especially girls, assume greater responsibilities in the household than would be the case in a two-parent family.

The majority of children were reluctant to report a recent unpleasant event in their family. The death or sickness of a grand-parent may constitute an unpleasant event.

Some of the children interviewed live in dysfunctional families, with financial, emotional, cognitive and learning difficulties:

- (a) one boy (V., aged 14) lives with his mother, 2 of his siblings (one is disabled) and his mother’s partner in a tiny basement flat; no one works, except his older brother; he has no contact with his biological father. They often have nothing to eat and take recourse to the municipality mess, along with a crowd of heterogeneous people. They seek support from the Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family, from a priest who acts as their confessor and friends. He has missed two school years because he had been sent away to his grandmother in a provincial city in the North. Finishing high school and finding a job appears to be the only way to be able to improve his life prospects.
- (b) another boy (V., aged 8) lives with his mother, uncle and grandmother, in a very small flat where he has to share the sitting room with his mother; he claims to have two fathers; his father has two older children with whom they meet on holidays; he had to repeat the first elementary grade at school.
- (c) a girl (H., aged 10) lives with her grandmother and, occasionally, her father (who is a drug addict) in a single-room flat in a run down inner city area; her mother (an Albanian immigrant) has left her when she was only one month old.

She has learning difficulties and receives after-school tuition. She is particularly concerned how she will cope in life if her grandmother dies.

- (d) a girl (K., aged 16) lives with her mother, who refuses to reveal to her who is her father, whom –of course- she has never met.

5.4.2. Financial issues

Very few children said that they are satisfied with their financial situation, although some of them lived quite comfortably. Most children felt that they do not have nearly as much money as they would like to, either as a family, or individually. Some children cannot even afford to buy food and school materials. Deprivation of basic goods such as electricity, central heating and running water has also been reported in a few cases. If they had more money, most of the children would primarily improve their housing conditions and then buy things for themselves, but also for their parents. Having a private car would make a great difference to some. Many would take dance or music lessons, engage in sport activities, or buy consumer goods such as a PC, books, toys, a bicycle, etc. Receiving presents from relatives and pocket money from both parents is greatly appreciated.

5.4.3. Time issues

Some children would like to spend more time with their parent, but this is not possible because of increased workload. The mother may be present at home, but she is not available. If they had more time with their parent, children would like to do things like watch TV or a DVD together, chat, etc. *“We don’t spend much time together with my dad. I’d like to play with him games like ‘play-station’”*. (Ph., aged 9). Children from SPFs have similar patterns of extra-curriculum activities (sports, foreign languages, music and dance lessons, etc.) as children from TPFs, with the exception of children from very poor background, whose families cannot afford any additional expenses.

5.4.4. Health issues

Explicit health problems were confined to one particular large single parent family. Hyperactivity was diagnosed in one of the children. Depression and emotional retardation were also mentioned by some professionals. Otherwise, despite the poor

housing conditions of many of the children interviewed, there do not seem to be any problems, linked to their family situation.

5.4.5. School life

In Perama, apart from more widespread learning difficulties, no particular problems with the children's school life have been reported.

- Occasionally, some teachers are accused of mistreating their pupils and of discriminating against children from SPFs, so there is some evidence of exclusion.
- Some secondary school teachers do not know the family situation of their students, so they do not treat them differently
- Some children said they like school because they learn new things and some of the teachers are good.
- Fewer lessons at school would be preferred by some students.
- Better school books.

Children from other areas expressed a strong dislike for the examination / evaluation system and for their excessive workload. Complains have been expressed regarding the narrow-mindedness of certain teachers and their "civil servant" mentality. The school became more attractive, for some of the children, during the "occupation" by students, as they took control from their teachers. As a girl pointed out, school could become a better place if teachers decided to give children stimuli and incentives to learn, rather than just get their job done. Some children complain that their teachers are too distant.

Low school performance and learning difficulties are quite common among the children interviewed, but they cannot be attributed solely to their family situation, as children from TPFs often have similar problems. Truancy problems among children from SPFs are very rare.

When problems arise between students (usually quarrels and misunderstandings), they prefer to solve them amongst them first, before going to the principal. The most common offense is to swear. Unpleasant events that may have occurred at school are rarely linked to the children's family situation.

The issue of discrimination is not the subject of particular concern. Very few incidents of discrimination towards children from SPFs have been reported. With two or three exceptions (verbal aggression from fellow-students, hostile attitude, physical violence), most children do not behave differently towards children from SPFs. Some of the children from SPFs are aggressive and hyper-sensitive, or are isolated from their peers.

5.6.1. Relations with others (relatives, peers, neighbours, etc.)

Friends are an important aspect of children's life and most seem to have at least a few. However, some of the children said that they have no friends. The things they usually do with their friends include: playing games, listening to music, reading extra-curriculum books, going to parties, hanging around the neighbourhood, going to cafeterias and Internet cafes, visiting their friends' home, etc. Younger children (boys) tend to play games outdoors.

Frequent communication and good relations with relatives, especially grandparents and cousins, offer children from SPFs emotional support, a sense of belonging, and alternative people to turn to when in need.

5.6.2. Services and support received by children from single parent families

Most of the children interviewed receive –or have received in the past- some kind of support or counselling, either in the form of out-of-school tuition, or/and psychological support. In Perama, the huge social welfare deficit is being consistently addressed by the Centre for Family and Child Care. In the inner city areas, children from SPFs receive support from the Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family and the Centre for Community Mental Health (Vyronas). Overall, children expressed their satisfaction with the services offered and felt that the professional are friendly with them.

At school, since there is no institutionalised counselling service for students and their parents, it is the teachers that often assume this role informally. The teachers in charge of the Career Orientation course, are often more supportive with students than other teachers and offer them advice on several issues, in total confidence.

5.6.3. The future of children from single parent families

Children from Perama feel bitter and pessimistic about their future. Only few dream of becoming artists or studying at the University. They are particularly worried about their future job prospects and view competition from migrant workers as a threat. Their concerns are exacerbated by the fact that they live in an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. They accuse employers of preferring to hire a migrant worker (Albanian mostly), rather than a Greek person. Their attitude towards migrant workers is hostile, whilst they view politicians in a very condescending way: “*they are all worthless*”, “*nobody does anything*”, “*only through acquaintances you can get a job*”, “*they don’t care*”, are some of the comments expressed.

All children would wish a better financial situation for their family, and better housing conditions. Some children worry because their mother has not made a fresh start in life with a new relationship, and they feel responsible towards her. As for children living in dysfunctional families, they seem to have minimal expectations in life.

Finally, their expectations from the political authorities vary greatly, from personal material requests (toys, better schools, free rent) to universal pleas, such as the following:

“I would ask the prime-minister for equality, eradication of poverty, and a world without orphans and racism” (P., boy aged 11).

5.6.4. Summary

- The family structures of the 22 children interviewed show significant diversity. The most widespread situation was that of divorced parents whose children live with the mother; but there were also two cases where the children live with their father, one case where they live with the grand-mother, five children with single mothers, and three orphans.
- Although every child interviewed experienced the fact of living in a SPF in a quite different way, the common thread running through many of the interviews is that children resent the fact that their parents have divorced and feel that life would be better if they lived with both their parents. Children that have been living a long time with only one parent reported that they have a calm family

life, without particular tensions. Even if there are tensions, the ties with the resident parent are very close

- Practical problems are often evoked: they range from simple commuting and time management problems and the absence of “proper” home-made food, to more complicated problems, associated with the lack of money and the absence of the other parent. As a result, some of the children, especially girls, assume greater responsibilities in the household than would be the case in a two-parent family.
- The majority of children were reluctant to report a recent unpleasant event in their family. The death or sickness of a grand-parent may constitute an unpleasant event.
- **Financial issues:** Most children felt that they do not have nearly as much money as they would like to, either as a family, or individually
- **Time issues:** Some children would like to spend more time with their parent, but this is not possible because of increased workload. The mother may be present at home, but she is not available. If they had more time with their parent, children would like to do things like watch TV or a DVD together, chat, etc. Children from SPFs have similar patterns of extra-curriculum activities as children from TPFs, with the exception of children from very poor background
- **Health issues:** Explicit health problems were confined to one particular large single parent family. Hyperactivity was diagnosed in one of the children. Depression and emotional retardation were also mentioned by some professionals. Otherwise, despite the poor housing conditions of many of the children interviewed, there do not seem to be any problems specifically linked to their single family status.
- **School life:** In Perama, apart from more widespread learning difficulties, no particular problems with the children’s school life have been reported. Children from other areas expressed a strong dislike for the examination / evaluation system and for their excessive workload. Complains have been expressed

regarding the narrow-mindedness of certain teachers and their “civil servant” mentality. Low school performance and learning difficulties are quite common among the children interviewed, but they cannot be attributed solely to their family situation, as children from TPFs often have similar problems. Truancy problems among children from SPFs are very rare.

- When problems arise between students (usually quarrels and misunderstandings), they prefer to solve them amongst them first, before going to the principal. The most common offense is to swear. Unpleasant events that may have occurred at school are rarely linked to the children’s family situation. The issue of discrimination is not the subject of particular concern
- **Relations with others:** Friends are an important aspect of children’s life and most seem to have at least a few. However, some of the children said that they have no friends. The things they usually do with their friends include: playing games, listening to music, reading extra-curriculum books, going to parties, hanging around the neighbourhood, going to cafeterias and Internet cafes, visiting their friends’ home, etc. Younger children (boys) tend to play outdoors. Frequent communication and good relations with relatives, especially grandparents and cousins, offer children from SPFs emotional support, a sense of belonging, and alternative people to turn to
- **Services and support received by children from single parent families:** Most of the children interviewed receive –or have received in the past- some kind of support or counselling, either in the form of out-of-school tuition, or/and psychological support. In Perama, the huge social welfare deficit is being consistently addressed by the Centre for Family and Child Care. In the inner city areas, children from SPFs receive support from the Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family and the Centre for Community Mental Health (Vyronas). Overall, children expressed their satisfaction with the services offered and felt that the professional are friendly with them.
- **The future of children from single parent families.** Children from Perama feel bitter and pessimistic about their future. Only few dream of becoming artists or studying at the University. They are particularly worried about their future job

prospects and view competition from migrant workers as a threat. All children would wish a better financial situation for their family, and better housing conditions.

Suggestions made by children

- emotional support to SPFs is not enough; financial support is also needed, as well as better benefits, in order to address the subsistence problems some of them are facing
- better housing conditions (a room of their own)
- better schools: the educational system needs to be drastically changed
- good job prospects for their parents and themselves

5.7. Parents' perspective

5.7.1. Family life of children from single parent families

For single parents interviewed in Perama, family life is marked not only by the absence of one of the parents, but mostly by the poor financial situation of the single parent, often exacerbated by unemployment or precarious employment. The lack of the male or female model is particularly stressed. Children usually do not discuss with the single parent about their family situation, they experience it in silence. Children's contact with the non-resident parent is very rare if not altogether non-existent, causing them feelings of anger and sadness. The absence of the mother, in particular, can be very traumatic for the children as it is very unusual. The emotional, financial and practical support of grand-parents (exclusively of the single parent), whenever available, is much welcomed by the single parents and very effective.

Single parents usually have no one to look after their children when they are away from home. (In one case, a divorced father had to take his daughters to work with him, as he had no one to leave them with. In another case, the mother had to leave her children unattended when she went to work). This deters them from having a social life. Their sense of loneliness and distress is increased by the fact that they have to cope with all the emotional and practical problems of family life alone. It is not surprising, therefore, that single parents found few advantages in living in a SPF household, such as the fact that children live in a more peaceful environment, without quarrels, that they are more independent and that the mother has a better control over her financial resources.

Parents from TPFs in Perama felt that despite the difficulties they are facing, if they lived in a SPF, it would be even more difficult. However, they pointed out that if the parents have a bad relationship, it is better for the children to live with only one parent. As a parent said: *"if the husband is good, it is alright to live in a TPF, but if there are problems between the couple, it is better to split and live on your own"*. Another woman from a large family complained that her husband does not make any contribution in family life because he is an alcoholic; even so, she thought that living in a SPF would be even worse.

5.7.2. Financial issues

Children from SPFs usually do not have enough pocket money to spend and feel deprived. They show understanding towards their parent and do not ask for more money or request things that they cannot afford. By far, their greatest desire that SPFs expressed if they had more money is to improve their housing conditions (which are very sub-standard, some households do not even have electricity and toilet facilities); other material needs they would like to cover include clothes, a PC, other gadgets, music or painting lessons, etc.

As for the single parents, they receive only a small cash benefit from the welfare services, if their income is low or if the child has been abandoned by the father.

Parents from TPFs, though from poor households themselves, are aware that if they lived in a SPF, their financial situation would have been even worst.

5.7.3. Time issues

Single parents are under great time pressure since they have to juggle their different responsibilities alone. Transportation to and from school and other out-of-school activities takes up an important share of their daily routine, especially when children are young and need to be accompanied.

The time single parents spend with their children varies, depending on the particular situation. Generally, single parents say they spend enough time with their children.

5.7.4. Health issues

No particular health problems were reported, despite the problematic housing conditions in some of the families in Perama.

5.7.5. School life

Indifference to and a dislike for school is quite common among children of SPFs, but this is not necessarily associated with their family situation, but rather with their socio-economic background. There are children from SPFs in Perama that do not continue in

the upper secondary school and lack opportunities to study in a state vocational school to acquire some skills. Some children from SPFs (as well as TPFs) in Perama face serious learning difficulties which the teachers are not trained to address (esp. dyslexia). All secondary school children involved in the project are offered daily out-of-school tuition in language and mathematics by qualified teachers at the local *Centre for Family and Child Care*. One single parent whose child had learning difficulties also requested assistance from the *Centre for Mental Health*.

Children from SPFs living in Perama or in deprived households usually have no one to assist them with their homework, as their parent is either unavailable, or of a low educational level. Most single parents cannot afford to offer their children private tutoring and extra-curriculum activities. This is true, however, of many TPFs of low income as well.

Provisional school performance problems may occur with children whose parents have recently (or about to) divorced. Aggressiveness is not uncommon.

Regarding discrimination at school, only one single parent from Perama reported that her child was stigmatized at school, because at first his father had not recognized him, and when this did happen, there were bureaucratic obstacles on behalf of the school director.

5.7.6. Relations with others (relatives, peers, neighbours, etc.)

Children from SPFs do not feel discriminated against by their peers, teachers, or neighbours. Only one single mother in Perama reported that her 4 children are “stigmatized” because of their family situation. Their social networks consist from class mates and from children living in the same neighbourhood. Their social life is pretty much the same as for the other children living in the area: they go out with their peers to cinemas, cafeterias, Internet Cafés, friends’ homes, etc.; they listen to music, or watch TV or a DVD, they play video games, etc. It is very rare for a child from a SPF not to have any friends.

5.7.7. Services and support received by children from single parent families

Services provided to SPFs and their children are viewed by all parents –from SPFs as well as TPFs- as totally inadequate. The only support SPFs from Perama receive is from the *Centre for Family and Child Care*: children get free tutoring, counselling and food, whilst parents get free professional advice. In the past, there were “neighbourhood counsellors” in Perama, which was a very helpful institution, but it was discontinued. In the inner city area, the children from SPFs that were interviewed receive support from the *Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family*. At school, there are no counselling services and teachers, although not trained, have to provide ad hoc support.

Welfare benefits are very low and always come with a considerable delay. The stringent eligibility criteria exclude the vast majority of single parent families.

5.7.8. The future of children from single parent families

As far as the children from Perama are concerned, their future is bleak. Living in one of the most deprived areas of Attica, with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, in a rapidly downgrading socio-cultural environment, constitutes already a considerable disadvantage. Living in a SPF just makes the situation even more unsustainable.

By contrast, children from other socio-economic backgrounds seem to have better chances.

The views expressed about politicians are not very flattering: “politicians don’t care about people, they only say words”.

Access to a job with decent pay – for the children when they finish school, as well as for their parents- is the universal request put forward to the authorities by parents and children alike. Better education, is also an issue.

5.7.9. Summary

- **Family life of children from single parent families:** for single parents interviewed in Perama, family life is marked not only by the absence of one of the parents, but mostly by the poor financial situation of the single parent, often exacerbated by unemployment or precarious employment. The emotional, financial and practical support of grand-parents (exclusively of the single parent), whenever available, is much welcomed by the single parents and very effective as single parents usually have no one to look after their children when they are away from home. Their sense of loneliness and distress is increased by the fact that they have to cope with all the emotional and practical problems of family life alone. It is not surprising, therefore, that single parents found few advantages in living in a SPF household
- **Financial issues:** children from SPFs usually do not have enough pocket money to spend and feel deprived. They show understanding towards their parent and do not ask for more money or request things that they cannot afford. By far, their greatest desire that SPFs expressed if they had more money is to improve their housing conditions (which are very sub-standard, some households do not even have electricity and toilet facilities).
- **Time issues:** single parents are under great time pressure since they have to juggle their different responsibilities alone. Transportation to and from school and other out-of-school activities takes up an important share of their daily routine, especially when children are young and need to be accompanied.
- **Health issues:** no particular health problems were reported, despite the problematic housing conditions in some of the families in Perama
- **School life:** all secondary school children involved in the project are offered daily out-of-school tuition in language and mathematics by qualified teachers at the local *Centre for Family and Child Care*. One single parent whose child had learning difficulties also requested assistance from the *Centre for Mental Health*. Regarding discrimination at school, only one single parent from Perama reported that her child was stigmatized at school, because at first his father had not

recognized him, and when this did happen, there were bureaucratic obstacles on behalf of the school director

- **Relations with others:** children from SPFs do not feel discriminated against by their peers, teachers, or neighbours. Only one single mother in Perama reported that her 4 children are “stigmatized” because of their family situation.
- **Services and support received by children from single parent families:** services provided to SPFs and their children are viewed by all parents –from SPFs as well as TPFs- as totally inadequate. The only support SPFs from Perama receive is from the *Centre for Family and Child Care*. In the past, there were “neighbourhood counsellors” in Perama, which was a very helpful institution, but it was discontinued. In the inner city area, the children from SPFs that were interviewed receive support from the *Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family*. At school, there are no counselling services and teachers, although not trained, have to provide ad hoc support. Welfare benefits are very low and always come with a considerable delay. The stringent eligibility criteria exclude the vast majority of single parent families.
- **The future of children:** the lack of perspectives regarding their future and their disbelief in the role the politicians can play in improving their living conditions and their opportunities in life is a common characteristic of children from deprived backgrounds.

CHAPTER 6: VALIDATION WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

Open discussion with professionals from support and social service organisations, teachers and educators, parents and children (Athens, 19-1-2007).

A special education teacher in Perama, pointed out that her impression that there are very few men heads of SPFs is confirmed by the research findings. She then went on to provide her own feedback on children from SPFs in Perama. According to her view, children from the Perama area know that their future will not go through the university and higher education, rather it will be in some sort of low skilled work. Because of this, their antagonism with immigrant labour is realistic. Services are inadequate not only with regard to school counsellors (as the central issue is not to open up job opportunities for psychologists), but primarily with regards to providing information services to SPFs about their rights, potential access to benefits and social support, and ways of dealing with the bureaucratic procedures of the welfare system, as most people neither know what their entitlements are nor can they navigate their way through the complex and confusing welfare system. Hence mechanisms of information about rights and access to benefits are the most pressing priority. Learning difficulties are usually the result of a low cultural environment of the family in her view, of the lack, that is, of order and stability in the family life. These create effects of pseudo retardation, as the child has poor cultural stimuli, and therefore reduced future prospects.

A psychologist from the Institute of Social Protection and Solidarity (I.K.P.A.) expressed her agreement with the statistical findings presented in the workshop regarding the poverty risk of SPFs, which is estimated at around 40%. Based on her professional experience, women who take the risk to divorce their partners have “guts”, have some sort of a decent job which allows them to survive financially on their own. Regarding potential psychological issues of children from SPFs her view is that the important factor is how parents handle their relationship with each other, the quality of this relationship. If their own relationship is under control then it is unlikely that children will be traumatised. She hypothesises that, based on recent developments in Western Europe, fathers are likely to demand more time with their children in the future, which may become grounds for conflict between divorced, separated and estranged mothers and fathers. She finally pointed out the need for more and more comparative research which will compare the experience of children from SPFs and TPFs.

The President of the Association of Single Parent Families, emphasised the fact that the official definition of poverty in Greece (annual income of less than € 6000), which is a condition for entitlement to benefits, is so low that it is actually embarrassing as a policy and offensive for the people who are in need. What is primarily important for SPFs is that they have a guaranteed decent living. As a member of the Association she has often found herself in delegations to politicians and members of government but all they get is “tea and sympathy” and nothing tangible. It imperative though that provisions are made for SPFs, not just for their own sake, but in the interest of the whole of society. Talking about poverty and SPFs, she points out that only 60% of divorced men pay child support, whereas all of them should. She notes the fragmentation of relevant policies, and the fact that, in her view, the state emphasises support to single mothers because there are only so few of them in Greece, so its financially less costly. The state promotes part time work for women heads of SPFs, but this is not a solution, as no family could live on €350 a month. And the erosion of the extended family and the wider community, which used to provide support in Greece, exacerbate poverty. She also notes that there is a general tendency to promote an image of SPFs as “problematic”, and needing support through piecemeal projects. This however in the end means a disclaimer of responsibility on the part of the state. She ends her contribution pointing out the need for the restructuring of the legal framework concerning guardianship, and the need for more flexible timetables for nurseries and primary schools, as child minding expenses are very high and they are not being subsidised through benefits. More generally, her experience tells her that the EU is abandoning the European social model and turning towards the US neo-liberal one.

A social worker, from the Welfare Department, Central Division of the Prefecture of Athens said that she certainly agrees that many things ought to change, but there is a need for a will to change. Welfare services provide many things, in her view: not only the “unprotected child” benefit (provided to all categories of SPFs) but also social security, counselling, and guidance. In her professional experience, SPFs and TPFs have common problems, and, for them to be addressed, social policy needs to be reformed. Also, there is a lack of experts who will be accessible to families with problems. Unfortunately, welfare services are characterised by bad working conditions, high pressure and lack of co-ordination and networking with other relevant organisations.

A state highschool teacher from Votanikos expressed the view that single parents some times cultivate feelings of anger and hostility to the child for the other parent. Generally, however, she does not think that children from SPFs have learning difficulties or problems with their lessons at school. Overall, their grades are OK, they do well and are motivated to be good students.

A participant who works as a sociologist at the Research Centre for Equality Issues (KETHI) pointed out that the issue of SPFs is multidimensional and, as Greece is a society in transition trying to solve postmodern problems in a traditional manner (primarily through the support of the extended family), change is experienced in a conflictual and guilt ridden manner, both in societal terms and in personal terms. So the underlying hostility of one parent towards the other may be viewed in this context. Turning to the macro level, he points out that for any change (institutional, social and political) to come about it is necessary that it is mobilised through pressure groups. There is no such tradition of activism in Greece, where the only effective pressure group seems to be the Church of Greece.

A professional counsellor from the Centre for Social Mental Health (K.K.Ps.Y., Vyronas –Kaisariani) expressed the view that some of the children who visit the centre and use its psychological and counselling services are there because of the pressure they are submitted to through their parents' conflict. Because of this, many of the centre's cases are instances of child depression (even though this is term which is not used in the relevant literature).

Another teacher from the state high school of Votanikos pointed out that parents do not know where to turn to when they face problems and teachers often do not know what to do when faced with cases of children from SPFs, whether they should be asking for information or not, as they may be considered indiscreet. She herself prefers to be informed about her pupils problems, and she uses the pupils card which may contain some information, and even then there may be issues regarding privacy and confidentiality. Children's learning difficulties and capacities are dependent on parents' stability and their cultural level. Some parents ask teachers for help with their children's grades (e.g. requests for raise of grades which do not reflect their abilities). There are cases where parents never come to the school for contact with the teachers and the school never seeks them either. In some cases, the school is subject to pressure by the

parent who has sole custody to stop contact with the other parent. There are cases when parents spend hours standing outside the school waiting to just see their child and the other parent forbids them to and tries to draw the teachers into that conflict too.

A lawyer from the Citizen's Ombudsman, Department of Children's Rights, said that, to her view, the only thing which can stop a parent from seeing their child is a Public Prosecutor's injunction and not the will of the other parent. She also stressed that such misconceptions are perpetuated partly because in Greece the law does not provide for joint custody, and only awards custody to one of the parents

Another participant, who is a social worker at the Centre for Prevention and Therapy indicated that it is clear from her studies and her experience that learning difficulties and behavioural problems are not linked to SPF status, as there are SPFs whose lives are rich in emotion and care. The Centre provides long term care and services, and the professional always see both parents. When preventive services are available which inform and educate children, issues relating to anger and bitterness and feelings of abandonment are better managed. In their work at the Centre they often find that there are wars waged between parents, with intense conflicts. Because of issues like these, mediation services are absolutely necessary and most helpful.

Finally, two adolescents from SPFs that participated in the empirical research and the validation meeting, voiced their own views and concerns about the issues discussed, thus adding their valuable perspective to the meeting and the project overall:

"I do not consider myself and those like me as "problematic" child, but there is suspicion from society itself and the media towards us. I don't think that this discussion ought to be focusing on the means that are available to us but on how we could make better use of them. In my view, regarding learning difficulties and other such matters, it is 80% the SPFs fault, but only when there are internal conflicts and lack of communication between the parents. And the family itself does not allow children to turn to the relevant organisations for assistance, thinking along the lines of 'is my child crazy to need a psychologist?'" (high school student, male, age 16).

"The reality is not exactly as it is presented by the project, it is even worse, as children, not only from SPFs – all of them, have great problems but no one admits it so that something can be done about them" (high school student, female, age 15).

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS AND CURRICULUM GUIDES

7.1. The representation of gender in primary education language textbooks.

It is generally accepted in the field of sociology of education that school textbooks and the official and unofficial curriculum content do not simply transfer knowledge and capacities but also shape students' perceptions of the social world in a particular ideological manner, assisting the students' socialisation in dominant social and cultural values (Βιτσιλάκη-Σορωνιάτη κ.ά., 2001). As a result, the detailed empirical analysis of the content and latent meaning of school textbooks has acquired special importance in the field of education studies, as it constructs particular gender concepts and roles, which in their turn influence students' general attitudes and perceptions concerning gender relations but also their specific expectations from themselves concerning their educational attainment, future choice of vocation and so on (Britton & Lumpkin, 1977).

In the Greek context, most research focusing on the analysis of school textbooks has concentrated on primary education language textbooks (Αναγνωστοπούλου, 1995, 1997, Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή, 1994, Κανταρτζή, 1991, Λούβρου, 1994, Προσκόλλη, 1989, Φρειδερίκου, 1995, 1998), as those contain a variety of texts referring to both family life and the social world; because of the variety of texts they contain, and of the broad pedagogical content of these texts they are ideal for the investigation of the roles designated to each gender and the stereotypes these contain. Additionally, the study of language textbooks in Greek primary education takes up a most significant amount of the students' personal study time (Βιτσιλάκη-Σορωνιάτη κ.ά., 2001). Literature and history books have also been examined (Κανατσούλη, 1997, Φρόση, 2000, Αθανασιάδου & Πετρίδου, 1997), and, more recently, there has been a growing interest in the gender stereotypes contained in natural science and mathematics textbooks (Παντίσκα & Ραβάνης, 1995).

As mentioned before, in the Greek context, the school textbooks which have been analysed most systematically and in significant depth of time have been the primary school language textbooks. This is related, as explained above, to the content of the books and their centrality in primary school education. Research interest in primary education language textbooks however has also potentially developed because of the anachronistic and backward character these texts had traditionally had (Δεληγιάννη-

Κουϊμτζή, 1994, Φραγκουδάκη, 1978) with reference to the representation of gender. New language education textbooks introduced in primary education in the early 1980s had consequently been considered a welcome forward step towards a more equal representation of gender, in accordance with the then novel policies of gender equality included in the programme of the administration at the time, and, more specifically, the General Secretariat for Equality (Ζιώγου-Καραστεργίου & Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή, 1998: 45). However, despite the fact that the then new textbooks did include more and more positive images of girls, the representations of gender in the books still lack the complexity and multiplicity characteristic of women's current experiences, and representations of traditional gender roles and stereotypes are still dominant. Additionally, at the linguistic and grammatical level (a level whose complexity cannot be done full justice through the tools of content analysis), it has been pointed out that even the assumed student reader of the books is nearly always addressed through the use of the masculine pronoun, as the word 'ο μαθητής' is used to address both genders (Λούβρου 1994).

Generally, feminist analyses of the explicit content of school textbooks – Greek and international – has emphasised the degree to which these incorporate sexist assumptions and preconceptions. Literature and history textbooks, in particular, fail to equally represent the activity of both genders, and contain assumptions and preconceptions which devalue women's experiences and achievements (Stanworth, 1986). The central point is that school textbooks not only put forward traditional and limited representations of women, but also, that, in doing so, they construct a distorted and unrealistic representation of society as a whole.

There are hardly any representations of SPFs in the Greek school textbooks, so this analysis turns to the wider issue of representations of gender and the way these shape the books' notions and images of the family. The representations of women contained in textbooks are primarily centred around the domestic sphere and the mothering function, therefore naturalising these as the only possible realms of women's existence, and erasing or delegitimising women's activities outside these so-called natural feminine realms.

More specifically, the findings of empirical research in the Greek context point out that the unequal representation of gender tends to assume the following forms:

1. School textbooks contain many more representations of masculinity rather than femininity. More characters in language textbooks tend to be men rather than women, *so the presence of the male gender is quantitatively dominant.*
2. Masculinity is also qualitatively dominant, in that the texts and illustrations of the textbooks tend to represent men as breadwinners and protectors of the family, often engaged in professions in the public sphere, and women as engaged in domestic activities in the private sphere, and having no particular creative attributes or personal interests outside these activities.
3. As a result of the constant mobilisation of the role of the mother as emotional and caring centre of the family, family life is also represented unrealistically in school textbooks.

So gender is represented stereotypically in primary school reading books regarding the roles men and women play within the context of the family, the professions they carry out and jobs they do in the public sphere, the differing relations between men and women and the members of their families, and generally with regard to the way their whole image is constructed.

Concerning *gender roles, within the context of the family*, women are generally presented as primarily mothers, who love their children and take care of them, as good wives who are being supportive to their husbands and as good housewives who are role models to their daughters. Men's roles on the other hand are very different: they are presented as the household's primary breadwinners and as family heads who define the lives of family members. Significantly, there are no references to men taking care of any of the household chores.

Primary school reading books also present stereotypical views concerning men's and women's *professional lives*. Women are generally presented as stay at home mothers and wives who do not work, and if they do, they only do so in order to help out their husbands support the family. Additionally, when they are presented as working, they work in caring professions, which are appropriate to their 'caring nature'. Men, on the other hand, are presented as working outside the family home, and the effort that goes into their professional life is often emphasised.

Different gender attributes *are also articulated in the representation of family relations between men, women and their children*. Mothers are represented as loving and affectionate to their children, and playing central parts in their lives, especially to their daughters'. The role of fathers, on the other hand, is constructed through concepts of duty towards their children and attempts to advise them on issues of the public sphere, such as choosing the appropriate profession.

Finally, differing gender attributes are also presented in the *general descriptions of men and women*. Female characters are presented as characterised by the stereotypical attributes of beauty, sensitivity, passivity, obedience and as not being particularly educated, whilst men are presented as active, hard working, and able to command their lives and those of their families.

However, the representations of gender and the family in primary school textbooks outlined above are slowly changing as the textbooks analysed above are gradually being replaced by new ones, the first of which have been in use since November 2006²⁶. In what follows we outline the most significant of these changes in the form of a list, in order to give an indication of the parameters of change which may follow in the primary school curriculum style and contents. This shift consists primarily in a retreat from the centrality hitherto occupied by the family in narratives and texts and in the increase of use of more 'neutral' examples from the animal world, fairy tales and so on. It has to be pointed out however that the character and desirability of these changes is currently the object of public debate in Greece, with some of them strongly disputed by self-titled 'traditionalists'.

- **First class language text book, vols. A, B, and C.** Most texts use examples and characters from the animal world, the object world and using characters from known fairy tales.
- **Third class. Vol. A:** only contains one reference to the family (p. 72). **Vol. B:** reference to young girl's mother doing the cooking (p. 34), reference to the girl's parents (p. 35), reference to the girl doing the cleaning up together with both of her parents (p. 38). Further on in the book, reference to conventional nuclear

²⁶ The 2006-7 school year in Greece started more than a month late due to a nationwide lengthy strike of school teachers.

family of four, where the father and not the mother writes a note for school (p. 46).

- **Fifth class. Vol. A:** reference to the mother only (p. 58). **Vol. B:** reference to both mother and father (p. 61). **Vol. C:** no reference to the family.
- **Sixth class. Vol. A:** child speaking in the text about its father on discussing how to make a cake (the family type is not clarified, p. 58). **Vol. B:** the female narrator makes reference to her mother and her father, whose profession (barber) is mentioned (p. 14). Further on reference is made to: a mother with a profession (cleaner) and her child (p. 32), a family consisting of father, mother, and children (p. 35), a girl talking of her mother (p. 84), a mother, father and son (p. 89, from the well known book *Petit Nicolas*), and, at the end of the book, a child is represented as talking about the various forms a family may have aside from his own nuclear family (p. 93). This last reference was the only reference explicitly made to single parent families.

Review of school books		
<u>Primary school</u>		
<u>First class</u>		
Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>First class</u>	We and the world	Εμείς και ο κόσμος
Specific references		
p.12 boys and girls are separated		
p.19 in the theme “my family” there is an illustration of a married man and woman		
p. 20 in the theme “my family” shows a couple, a grand-mother, three children and asks the question “is your family like this one?”		
p.20 shows an uncle, an aunt and two cousins		
p. 25 Birthday representation of the family, “Draw your family”p.107 What does a family need ? Couple and two children are represented, the Grand-mother too.		
p.138, 145		
General comments		
This book is organized by themes. It consists of drawings and exercises. It is a quite old		

book (70-80's representations, except for coins which are in euros), old-fashioned and very traditional. The illustrations are outdated –especially clothes, the mother who feeds p.21. The typical family appears to consist of a couple and two children.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>First class</i>	My language 1	Η γλώσσα μου

Specific references

p.19 shows a family composed by a couple, two children and the grand-mother
The book mainly illustrates children, sometimes children with their grand-mother (p.106, p.128, p.179) or with the grand- father (p.111, p.135, p.152)
p. 130 shows two parents
p.173 shows the two parents and the grand-mothers

General comments

Most of the time the pictures illustrate children (e.g. playing together) without the presence of an adult. Grand-parents are very often represented but not together (the grand-mother separately from the grand-father).

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>First class</i>	My language 2	Η γλώσσα μου

Specific references

-

General comments

Illustrations with drawings. They mainly represent children at school. Sometimes, grand-mother or father are also represented.
There is no specific reference to the family.

Second class

Level	Title	Comments
<i>Second class</i>	We and the world	Εμείς και ο κόσμος

Specific references

p. 14-17 Themes on family. Drawing showing the father, the mother, two or three children, the grand-mother, and a cat.
p. 17 Genealogic tree with the grand-mother and grand-father, parents of the mother, three couples, the children (grand-children).
p. 18-19 representation of the families, eating.

p.19 “Is it this family one family ?” Picture of one mother and 8 children. This question and drawing are about large family or about OPF or both ? It is difficult to know.

p. 76 shows a family picnic with one man two women and a child.

p. 153 shows a man, a woman and a baby.

p.154 “What does the family provide us? The answer seems to be security.

General comments

This book is organized by themes (children learn and compare). This book is morally oriented : what should be done ? What is right ?

Level	Title	Comments
<u>Second class</u>	My language 1	Η γλώσσα μου Πρώτο μέρος

Specific references

p.23 The father and the son at the garage

p.51 The child and her mother and the radio.

p.71 Mother and son

p.89 Dimitris and his father

General comments

It is not specified in the text if the illustrations refer to a SPF or a TPF.

Level	Title	Comments
<u>Second class</u>	My language 2	Η γλώσσα μου Δεύτερο μέρος

Specific references

p.27 An illustration and the text refer to daddy, mammy, grand-father and children.

p.30 Daddy, Mammy, daughter

p. 57 A mammy reads a letter to her two children (boy and girl) from their father who is a seaman.

p.83 A child is waiting for his grand-father.

General comments

This book is structured by illustrations, short texts and exercises as the other books.

Texts and illustrations are about TV, painters, cold, smells, animals, with no specific reference to the family.

Level	Title	Comments
<u>Second class</u>	My language 3	Η γλώσσα μου Τρίτο μέρος

Specific references

p.22 a baby, a mother , a father and the brother of the bay-sister are shown.

p.33 shows a mother and her daughter at a museum.

p.37 shows two children and a couple at home.

p.48-49 two children and two adults play football. Intervention of the mother of one child (or both) and wife of one adult.

p.56-57 One family without electricity (from 12.00 to 22.00) It illustrates the father, the mother, the grand-mother in a drawing and they write about the father, the mother and one child in the text.

p.69 Stratis and his father in an elevator.

p. 84 Thomas and his sister are cooking.

General comments

It is the same kind of book as the previous books in the series “My language”: the book is divided by themes and each theme consists of illustrations drawings and exercises. This book does not especially refer to the family.

Level	Title	Comments
<i>Second class</i>	My language 4	Η γλώσσα μου Τέταρτο μέρος

Specific references

p.64: in the grand-father’s cellar

General comments

There is no relation to the family.

This book shows children’s life or themes which are not related to the family.

Third class

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>third class</i>	My language 1	Η γλώσσα μου

Specific references

p.8-9 illustration of a family, consisting of a couple and two children –a boy and a girl-

p.29 a father wakes up his two children, a girl and a boy.

p.44 reference to a girl, accompanied by her mother, who pay a visit to the aunt

p.49 a girl speaking with her father

p.53 a boy and his mother

p.65 a boy and his father (at the garage)

p. 68-69 an illustration of a man and two children in a car.

p. 72 reference to a boy and his two parents in the text.

General comments

They don't make any reference to the mother and the father together.

Level	Title	Comments
<u>Third class</u>	My language 2	Η γλώσσα μου 2

Specific references

p. 28 a young girl writes a letter. It refers to her parents who work a lot.

p. 57 a 12-year old boy (Basil) from a rural area in North-Western Greece is left behind by his parents, who need to leave their village to take up a job abroad. The grand-parents will look after him.

p. 59-60 the parents are shown to quarrel and be angry. The question put to the pupils is "what do you think about this situation"?

p. 63 a little girl with her grand-mother.

p. 82 Haris and his father at the market

p.109-110 a family consisting of the mother, the father and the children listen to a Christmas song

General comments

The text book presents mainly professions, as well as texts and illustrations from the Greek mythology. No specific reference is made to the family.

Level	Title	Comments
<u>Third class</u>	My language 3	Η γλώσσα μου 3

Specific references

p. 34 a drawing, a mother, a child and their dog

p. 50 the father with two daughters who are married

p. 76 a boy, a grand mother and a dog. The father comes back home

p. 80 a mother and her children are at home and the father is away as a seaman.

General comments

This book is not related to the family. It describes nature, and refers to Greek mythology, children's stories, etc...

Level	Title	Comments
<u>Third class</u>	My language 4	Η γλώσσα μου 4

Specific references

p. 66 poem recited to the mother. Illustration with mothers, grand-mothers and children.

p.72 the grand-father comes to see his grand-children and his daughter.

General comments

This book is not related to the family. It refers to Greek mythology, stories, a house on fire, a description of the village on the first of May, Easter celebration, etc.

Level	Title	Comments
<i>Third class</i>	We and the world	Εμείς και ο κόσμος

Specific references

p.154 a picnic with the mother, the father and two children on the theme “how do human beings feed themselves”.

p.168 Georges’ parents are on a holiday leave (theme: workers’ rights).

General comments

This book is focused on environmental study. Traditional representations. Quite moralistic. People and children are illustrated, but not as part of a family.

Fourth class (A’)

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>Fourth class</i>	We and the world 1	Εμείς και ο κόσμος πρώτο μέρος

Specific references

None.

General comments

None. This book is focused on Greek geography, transports, history (classical Greece, Hellenism, Greek modern history) and the institutions.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>Fourth class</i>	We and the world 2	Εμείς και ο κόσμος δεύτερο μέρος

Specific references

None

General comments

None. This book is focused on nature (plants, animals), technology and physics

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>Fourth class</i>	My language 1	Η γλώσσα μου 1

Specific references

p. 35 four children and their parents work.

p. 44 two children. Their mother has died. After a while, their father remarried. They love their “new mother”.

p. 57-58 children, mother and father are talking about special triads

p. 73-74-75 a child, Andreas, goes on foot to get a doctor for his father. No mention is made of the mother.

p. 98 on the theme “the war” the text speaks about a child, his father and his grand-father.

p.117 a mother visits the art museum with her child.

General comments

p.44 is of a special interest to us because it shows a SPF, and how it may be recomposed into new forms.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Fourth class</u>	My language 2	Η γλώσσα μου 2

Specific references

p. 34 an illustration with the presumed mother and father, and their child. The text mentions the father and the mother of the child.

p. 43-46 the text refers to the father and the mother of a child, as well as to the aunt.

p. 49 in prehistoric times, the presumed father, mother and a child in her arms. The man is the hunter and the woman takes care of the child.

p. 61 shows a “family of animals”. It illustrates a mother, a father and children partridges. The father partridge saves his family from the hunter.

p. 75 a child (boy), with mother, father and uncle.

p. 79 A King and his three daughters in the text and in a drawing. The queen does not appear (or does not live anymore) in this story.

p. 84-85 A family with a father, a mother, a child and a baby.

p.93 The presumed parents and a child.

p.96 makes a reference to the mother, the father of a journalist who remembers when he was a child.

p.114 A Chinese child with his parents and brothers.

General comments

The references are quite traditional. Nevertheless, there is also a reference to one parent without mentioning the other parent.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Fourth class</u>	My language 3	Η γλώσσα μου 3

Specific comments

p.43 children and a grand-mother

p.62 a grand-mother, a mother, one friend and a child with his clock.

p.72 in the old times. The father and his daughter. No reference is made to the mother.

p.102 an orphan child at the time of the national independence war.

General comments

Nothing special to point out.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Fourth class</u>	My language 4	Η γλώσσα μου 4

Specific comments

p.23 mentions the story of Jean Errikos Pestalotsi, a hero whose father died when he was very young and his mother brought him up on her own. He became the director of an orphanage.

p.75 A child who liked his mother to tell him stories.

General comments

A lot of sub-themes are related to the sea, but not to the family, except the two above mentioned.

Fifth class (ε')

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Fifth class</u>	Research and discovery	Ερευνώ και ανακαλύπτω

Specific comments

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General comments

This small book is entirely written as an introduction to chemistry and physics.

It is not at all related to the family.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Fifth class</u>	Research and discovery II	Ερευνώ και ανακαλύπτω

Specific comments

-

General comments

This book focuses on physics and chemistry (air, water, environment protection, electricity, sound, etc...)

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Fifth class</u>	Social and political education	Κοινωνική και πολιτική αγωγή

Specific comments

p.23 An illustration represents the father, the mother and three children (one boy, two girls).

p.23 “A family is created through marriage”.

p.25 “Birth brings joy in the family”. Two illustrations, showing a couple that goes to a maternity hospital and a couple that comes out of the maternity with a baby.

p.26 An illustration represents the father, the mother and two children

p.30 Georges’ life is fine with his parents and his sister.

p.31 An illustration shows a father, a mother, a grand-mother and two children

p.33 An illustration represents the father reading a newspaper and the mother washing dishes with the heading “in the past”, whilst another illustration represents a couple washing dishes with the heading “nowadays”. It is always a couple.

General comments

The theme “family” is represented in pp.23-36. There is no reference to the family in the other parts of the book.

The point of reference is always the couple with children.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>Fifth class</i>	My language 1	Η γλώσσα μου 1

Specific comments

p.108 there is a reference to a family with mother, father and children.

General comments

With the exception of pp.108-109, this book does not contain any references to the family.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>Fifth class</i>	My language 2	Η γλώσσα μου 2

Specific comments

p.12 Two young boys are shown on their father’s shoulders.

General comments

There are no references to the family.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<i>Fifth class</i>	My language 3	Η γλώσσα μου 3

Specific comments

-

General comments

There are no references to the family.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u><i>Fifth class</i></u>	My language 4	Η γλώσσα μου 4

Specific comments

p.50-51 There is a story with a family, consisting of the mother, the father and the children and a goat.

p.114-115 There is a story of a young boy. Reference is made to the members of his family : father, mother aunt, grand-father.

General comments

There is nothing connected to the family. The book is composed by extracts of books. The main topic is the sea or stories with small children without reference to the family.

Sixth class (στ')

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u><i>Sixth class</i></u>	Economy and myself	Οικονομία και εγώ

Specific comments

p.17 There is a reference to “my parents” but they could be divorced. The single parent family due to the death of one parents is not taken into account.

p.21 There is a reference to a family with one or two breadwinners. An exercise is about what could happen to the family if just one or if both parents are working.

General comments

The book is divided into themes. One theme is the family budget. They write about the family expenses, earnings, etc., so they do not refer to TPF or OPF.

This book is neutral in general and does not refer to family except in one theme.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u><i>Sixth class</i></u>	Sociological and political education	Κοινωνική και πολιτική αγωγή

Specific comments

p.9 reference to a family which is composed of children and parents.

p.10 Reference to the past and the gender division of labour (domestic labour to the wife and external labour to the husband). Then reference to modern life where both, father and mother, want a salary work

p.98-99 and 100 **Children do have rights** p.99 They have the right to be loved by their parents.

General comments

There is little reference to family. The most interesting aspect of the book is a presentation of the children's rights.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Sixth class</u>	My language I	Η Γλώσσα μου I

Specific comments

p.50 one reference to the family ascendant (he is the son of James etc)

p.127 One reference the grand-father

General comments

This book contents any important references to family. This book is composed by extracts of books and exercises.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Sixth class</u>	My language II	Η Γλώσσα μου II

Specific comments

p.64 "and I could see my wife" without any mention of children.

General comments

The book is mostly about animals (eagle, deer, donkey,) without any reference to the family. This book also consists of extracts of books and exercises.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Sixth class</u>	My language III	Η Γλώσσα μου III

Specific comments

p.40 there is a reference to working mothers and their children. There are no references to the fathers. The Theme is what to do with children when the mother works.

p.88 illustrates the whole family of Alexander the Great (Olympiada, his father and his new wife).

General comments

As the previous books of the series "my language", this book is composed by extracts of books and exercises.

Level	Title	Τίτλος
<u>Sixth class</u>	My language IV	Η Γλώσσα μου IV

Specific comments

-

General comments

This book is also composed by extracts of books and exercises with no relation to the

family. The emphasis is on childhood memories, but there is no reference to the family.

7.2. Summary

- There are hardly any representations of SPFs in Greek school textbooks, hence our research turned to the analysis of representations of gender and the way these shape the books' notions and images of the family. The findings of empirical research in the Greek context point out that the unequal representation of gender in school textbooks tends to assume the following forms:
 1. School textbooks contain many more representations of masculinity rather than femininity. More characters in language textbooks tend to be men rather than women, *so the presence of the male gender is quantitatively dominant.*
 2. Masculinity is also qualitatively dominant, in that the texts and illustrations of the textbooks tend to represent men as breadwinners and protectors of the family, often engaged in professions in the public sphere, and women as engaged in domestic activities in the private sphere, and having no particular creative attributes or personal interests outside these activities.
 3. As a result of the constant mobilisation of the role of the mother as emotional and caring centre of the family, family life is also represented unrealistically in school textbooks.
- Concerning *gender roles, within the context of the family*, women are generally presented as primarily mothers, who love their children and take care of them, as good wives who are being supportive to their husbands and as good housewives who are role models to their daughters. Men are presented as the household's primary breadwinners and as family heads who define the lives of family members. Significantly, there are no references to men taking care of any of the household chores.
- Different gender attributes *are also articulated in the representation of family relations between men, women and their children.* Mothers are represented as loving and affectionate to their children, and playing central parts in their lives, especially to their daughters'. The role of fathers, on the other hand, is

constructed through concepts of duty towards their children and attempts to advise them on issues of the public sphere, such as choosing the appropriate profession.

- However, the representations of gender and the family in primary school textbooks outlined above are slowly changing as the textbooks analysed above are gradually being replaced by new ones, the first of which have been in use since November 2006. This shift consists primarily in a retreat from the centrality hitherto occupied by the family in narratives and texts and in the increase of use of more 'neutral' examples from the animal world, fairy tales and so on.

CHAPTER 8: SCHOOL PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

There are no specific school practices and procedures regarding single parent families in the Greek education system. There are no particular provisions for children of single parent families, nor are there specific directives from the Greek ministry of Education regarding these students as a specific population whose needs ought to be addressed in particular ways.

School teachers and headmasters have reported in their interviews that they do not consider children of SPFs as a specific and clearly definable population, with needs and characteristics that can be assumed to be stable or unchanging, regardless of the specific family circumstances and student attributes. Additionally, teachers and headmasters reported that there is no data available to the school indicating each child's family status, so any knowledge on children's family and/or home situation tends to be informal, and either volunteered by the parents (more frequently) or the child (more infrequently), or some times the result of hearsay in the school.

When issues regarding children's educational abilities and achievements or emotional and psychological wellbeing arise, teachers and school professionals reported that they are obliged to cope with them on a case by case basis, as there are no official directives addressing these. Additionally, all the school professionals we interviewed reported that they felt the intense lack of any training targeted to deal with such issues, regardless of the family status of the children involved.

Teachers and headmasters also report that they would welcome some training in psychological or counselling skills themselves in order to be facilitated in identifying possible problems and/or issues in emotional or educational adjustment earlier on and before they become so serious that they are obviously apparent. As they often pointed out, even when they do realise that there is problem it is very difficult for them to know what to do and how to cope with it in the context of the classroom environment, so that sometimes they prefer to not do anything, for fear that they will embarrass or stigmatise the child or the family or for fear that they might intervene in a way which will not be helpful or productive in the end. As someone said "... we simply do not have appropriate training in psychology in order to help in the better adjustment of children who come family backgrounds with problems".

On the basis of the above, teachers and headmasters, as well as professionals from Family centres, all strongly emphasised the need for in-school resident relevant professionals (educational and child psychologists as well as social workers) who would be able to provide the necessary and adequately qualified support. According to their view, the official incorporation of such professions into the school system by the ministry, and the mandatory staffing of schools with them is a necessity if schools are to fully cater to their students' complex needs. As one teacher reported "it is difficult to know if and when to broach a subject to start with, and how to discuss it with the parent, in case they get offended or consider it an intervention in their private life. On top of this, even if you do try to discuss the subject, you have no solution to suggest and no mechanism to turn to, certainly not one in the school system".

While teachers and headmasters do not believe that a radical reconstruction of the curriculum is necessary in order to address SPFs they do however support the modernisation of the contents of school textbooks in order to reflect the complexity and diversity of contemporary forms of family and the gendered division of labour.

Additionally, teachers and headmasters reflected on their role as educators and the school's role in children's socialisation and in providing a centre for communities, emphasising the need for schools to inform the community and sensitise it on the needs of SPFs. Supporting this is also some research evidence²⁷ suggesting that primary school teachers consider the subjects of "Social and Political Education" and "Language and literature" as most appropriate for classroom discussions and sensitisation on SPFs.

Summary

- There are no specific school practices and procedures regarding single parent families in the Greek education system. There are no particular provisions for children of single parent families, nor are there specific directives from the Greek ministry of Education regarding these students as a specific population whose needs ought to be addressed in particular ways.

²⁷ Arhontoglou, A. (2005), *Scholiki epidosi kai symperifora ton paidion apo monogoneikes oikogeneies sto dimotiko sxoleio*, Thessaloniki, Afoi Kyriakidi (Αρχοντόγλου, Α., (2005), *Σχολική επίδοση και συμπεριφορά των παιδιών από μονογονεϊκές οικογένειες στο δημοτικό σχολείο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, Αφοί Κυριακίδη)

- Teachers and headmasters reported that they do not view children of SPFs as a population that has specific characteristics or needs. However, when issues arise, teachers and school professionals reported that they are obliged to cope with them on a case by case basis, as there are no official directives addressing these. Additionally, all the school professionals reported that they felt the intense lack of any training targeted to deal with such issues, regardless of the family status of the children involved.
- Teachers and headmasters report that they would welcome some training in psychological or counselling skills themselves when they first arise in the classroom. Additionally, they all strongly emphasised the need for in-school resident relevant professionals (educational and child psychologists as well as social workers) who would be able to provide the necessary and adequately qualified support.
- The teachers and headmasters interviewed support the modernisation of the contents of school textbooks in order to reflect the complexity and diversity of contemporary forms of family and the gendered division of labour.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1. Empirical research

9.1.1. Key findings

Our qualitative research on the experience of children living in Single Parent Families has allowed us to draw a set of general conclusions:

- Living in a SPF does not, in itself, constitute a source of emotional, behavioural or psychological problems, or of learning and adjustment difficulties, let alone of social exclusion.
- Poverty, deprivation, and a run-down socio-economic environment, as well as an unstable family background, constitute more important aggravating factors than the family structure.
- The residuary social welfare safety net leaves large sections of the more vulnerable groups (that include SPFs) uncovered.
- Children living in dysfunctional families or in deprivation have a marked lack of ambition, aims and vision regarding their future prospects.
- Stereotypes regarding SPFs and their children have to a large degree retreated in recent years, as compared to the past. The problem persists however –even if subliminal- for children born out-of-wedlock, who remain a statistically unimportant, yet potentially more vulnerable segment of the population.

9.1.2. Policy recommendations

It is of central importance to emphasise the structural obstacles in gaining access to children for interviewing and other research purposes through state agencies and schools, as these were outlined in section 2. The combination of understaffing, heavy workload, bureaucratic work procedures and paternalist (organisational) cultures make access to children and listening to their own voices in an unmediated fashion, despite the frequently good intentions of the professionals involved, extremely difficult and fundamentally uncertain. Under such circumstances the frequently stated government commitment to children's rights cannot be fully realised, and child centred policies risk being designed and realised solely on the basis of the views of either parents or professionals, therefore unduly delimiting the scope and influence of children's participation in the making of their future.

Given the lack of focus on single parent families in the context of social policy and education policy it is recommended that measures explicitly designed for the support of single parent families are incorporated into current policy, so as to alleviate social and educational exclusion, as well as financially supporting SPFs.

In terms of the services, the need for drastically improving services to children and families in difficulty has been stressed by all professionals, parents and children themselves. The lack of professional support is evident in many respects.

(a) *Counseling services* at school or in the community are virtually non existent and the needs are addressed only erratically and with considerable delay. Children have no one to turn to for advice and support whilst parents are usually reluctant to seek advice but also face the practical problem of lack of appropriate agents and services. All schools should be in the position to offer in house counseling services, even if only on a part-time basis, by a psychologist, who can see children, as well as parents.

(b) *Financial support*, awarded by the welfare authorities to “unprotected children” in the form of a cash benefit, is extremely inadequate and only very poor SPFs are eligible for it.²⁸ Children from very low income families who are in the age group of mandatory schooling (i.e. up to 15 years of age) are also entitled to a “school benefit” of € 300 annually. The introduction of a guaranteed minimum income or the generous increase in cash benefits would minimize the number of those left outside the safety net.

(c) *Affordable childcare* services are still not widely available for pre-school children; moreover, only employed women have access to them, thus increasing the difficulties for unemployed women to look for a job. Single parents find it increasingly difficult to reconcile their family responsibilities with a paid job. There are no childcare services for women working in the afternoon and on Saturday.

(d) *Decentralised and better organized social welfare services*, adequately staffed, should be a priority. At present, many densely populated areas are not covered by any social service agencies. State and local government welfare authorities, severely under-

²⁸ The monthly allowance is € 44 per month for one child, and only SPFs earning less than € 235 / month are eligible for it.

staffed, can only address the most critical cases and refer the less severe ones to other authorities. Social workers and psychologists often work under extreme pressure and do not devote as much time as would be necessary to the families requesting support. In addition, red tape procedure prevents the professionals from doing their work properly. A lot more counseling should be offered within the Prefecture welfare services by specialized child psychologists rather than social workers. A social welfare and child protection service should be established within the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity; social workers need to be recruited by the ministries of Education and Justice, so as to ease the burden on the few social workers working at the Prefecture welfare services. Moreover, professionals need continuous training and upgrading of their skills.

(e) *After-school tuition* for students lagging behind in class has proved extremely effective in reducing the rate of drop-outs and in preventing social exclusion; this initiative should be reinforced and become more widespread.

(f) *Access to paid employment* for the single parent in charge of the household constitutes the best remedy to the problems of social exclusion experienced by SPFs.

(g) *Low cost decent housing* for SPFs should become available, e.g. through an extended council housing programme. The problem is particularly acute in the case of families in a crisis situation, as there is only one hostel in Athens and one in Thessaloniki that can offer a safe refuge.

(h) The issue of *abused children* needs to be addressed in a much more systematic and effective way: not all professionals offering counseling services are qualified to interfere in such matters.

(i) *Soft social services* can be more effective. For example, preventive services, or a service charged with the solution of practical problems faced by SPFs would be very useful; home assistance would also be valuable. To this end, the empowerment of the NGOs that deal with family and children's issue could drastically improve the reach and effectiveness of prevention policies.

(j) *Access to information* regarding the rights of SPFs: the “hear-say system” is at present the most widely used method for having access to basic entitlements. As a result, many would be beneficiaries are deprived of their entitlements. The establishment of local information services at the municipal or wider neighbourhood level could prove very effective in coordinating, articulating and making more effective the plethora of fragmentary and disjointed policy tools that are available.

(k) *Mentoring schemes* involving regular socialisation and activities, especially of male children and teenagers, with men of approved character could aid in the development of appropriate male roles models, according to psychologists and social workers interviewed.

Most of all, if social policies are to become better targeted and much more effective, authorities need to address the problems associated with “late modernity” with a contemporary and open-minded rather than traditional /anachronistic approach.

9.2. Analysis of school textbooks and curriculum guides

9.2.1. Key findings

There are hardly any representations of SPFs in Greek school textbooks, hence our research turned to the analysis of representations of gender and the way these shape the books’ notions and images of the family. The findings of empirical research in the Greek context point out that the unequal representation of gender in school textbooks tends to assume the following forms:

1. School textbooks contain many more representations of masculinity rather than femininity. More characters in language textbooks tend to be men rather than women, *so the presence of the male gender is quantitatively dominant.*
2. Masculinity is also qualitatively dominant, in that the texts and illustrations of the textbooks tend to represent men as breadwinners and protectors of the family, often engaged in professions in the public sphere, and women as engaged in domestic activities in the private sphere, and having no particular creative attributes or personal interests outside these activities.

3. As a result of the constant mobilisation of the role of the mother as emotional and caring centre of the family, family life is also represented unrealistically in school textbooks.

Concerning *gender roles, within the context of the family*, women are generally presented as primarily mothers, who love their children and take care of them, as good wives who are being supportive to their husbands and as good housewives who are role models to their daughters. Men are presented as the household's primary breadwinners and as family heads who define the lives of family members. Significantly, there are no references to men taking care of any of the household chores

Different gender attributes *are also articulated in the representation of family relations between men, women and their children*. Mothers are represented as loving and affectionate to their children, and playing central parts in their lives, especially to their daughters'. The role of fathers, on the other hand, is constructed through concepts of duty towards their children and attempts to advise them on issues of the public sphere, such as choosing the appropriate profession

9.2.2. Policy Recommendations

Modernisation of the contents of school books and the curriculum, so that it includes more and more diverse representations of gender roles, for both women and men, in both the public and the private sphere is absolutely necessary. This would also mean modernisation of the representations of the family, to include both more representations and images of SPFs as just another form of familial organisation, and equal divisions of labour within the family between men and women, so as to accurately reflect the diversity and fluidity of contemporary family forms and the organisation of relations and everyday life within the context of the family. A retreat of the dominance of the family as a narrative device, such as the one slowly being demonstrated by the new primary school language education textbooks would also be desirable.

9.3. School practices and procedures

9.3.1. Key Findings

There are no specific school practices and procedures regarding single parent families in the Greek education system. There are no particular provisions for children of single parent families, nor are there specific directives from the Greek ministry of Education regarding these students as a specific population whose needs ought to be addressed in particular ways.

Teachers and headmasters reported that they do not view children of SPFs as a population that has specific characteristics or needs. However, when issues arise, teachers and school professionals reported that they are obliged to cope with them on a case by case basis, as there are no official directives addressing these. Additionally, all the school professionals reported that they felt the intense lack of any training targeted to deal with such issues, regardless of the family status of the children involved.

Teachers and headmasters report that they would welcome some training in psychological or counselling skills themselves when they first arise in the classroom. Additionally, they all strongly emphasised the need for in-school resident relevant professionals (educational and child psychologists as well as social workers) who would be able to provide the necessary and adequately qualified support.

The teachers and headmasters interviewed support the modernisation of the contents of school textbooks in order to reflect the complexity and diversity of contemporary forms of family and the gendered division of labour.

9.3.2. Policy Recommendations

In school psychological and social support and counselling should be instituted by the Ministry of Education, and some basic training and sensitisation to the realities of SPFs and the problems children of SPFs might be facing ought to be provided to the teachers, who feel they lack the expertise to deal with such issues on the basis of their teacher training only. The contents of school textbooks as well as school procedures and practices should be modernised to reflect the diversity and variety in the forms of contemporary family life.

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Φάκελος 2, σσ. 53-63.

ANNEX 1

Data used for the Statistical review of Single Parent Families in Greece

Data presented in this paper are based on the results of the survey on “European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions” (EU-SILC), carried out in 2003 by the National Statistical Service of Greece (ESYE) in collaboration with the National Centre For Social Research, Institute of Social Policy, in the framework of the nationwide research programme “Excellence in the research fields :Poverty, Exclusion and Social Inequalities” (Coordinating research team: Sakellis I., Karantinos D., Balourdos D., Ziomas D., Bouzas N., Ketsetzopoulou M., Chrysakis E., Kikilias E.).

EU-SILC is a survey based on a European standardized questionnaire and has replaced the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). It involves interviewing of a representative sample of households and individuals, covering a large range of topics (demography, income, education, employment, living conditions, etc.). EKKE’s research programme, financed under the Greek Operational Programme “Competitiveness”, contributed to the SILC Survey by, firstly, enriching the questionnaire with additional questions on social exclusion aspects for which there has been only limited information in Greece and secondly extending the sample of households in Western Greece to ensure statistical consistency in selected regions experiencing high poverty rates.

The EU-SILC, like other household surveys, does not cover persons living in collective households, people who are homeless or other difficult to reach groups. As a result, the total number of the population is less than the one released by the national population census in 2001.

ANNEX 2

Organisations interviewed

1. Centre for Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support (KDAY).

This Centre –with its various regional annexes- is a fairly recent institution affiliated to the Ministry of Education and was established in 2000, in view of addressing the learning or/and adjustment difficulties of pupils aged between 4-22, that are studying in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education establishments. The Centre is constitutionally designated to diagnose, evaluate and offer support services to children and adolescents facing learning difficulties and/or adjustment difficulties. The Centre also copes with children of SPF incidentally, in the event that they face some sort of learning difficulties at school, or adjustment problems, owing to disability or family problems. The Centre is dramatically understaffed, since the student population that needs to be covered is huge; as a result, there are long waiting lists for all the services they provide.

2. Family and Childcare Centre (FCC – Κέντρο Μέριμνας Οικογένειας και Παιδιού, ΚΜΟΠ).

The Family and Childcare Centre is a non-governmental organisation, founded in 1977 by staff specialising in matters relating to the provision of social services, counselling services and education. Its main aims are to provide support to the family through the provision of holistic social services, support to people who are in risk of social exclusion, to improve quality of life in deprived urban areas, and to develop scientific research and the related social policy expertise on the aforementioned issues.

The service users which the FCC primarily addresses are the following:

- Families facing emotional, social, and professional difficulties
- People suffering from physiological and psychological disorders
- School children facing adjustment issues in the school environment
- Single parent families
- Long term unemployed people and those excluded from the job market
- Immigrants, emigrants, Roma people, and refugees.

The expertise that FCC has gathered over the past three decades falls into seven main areas namely: social inclusion, youth and education, employability, gender equality, mental health, entrepreneurship and social economy. Young people and education in its various forms have always been issues central to the services provided by the FCC; improving the lives of children and young people in difficult situations, and, by extension, their families. Focusing many of its efforts in disadvantaged areas, FCC targets youth at risk, aiming to engage them more fully in the educational system and reduce the rate of high school dropouts. Activities focus not only on education and afterschool, but also youth development. The FCC advocates assisting these young people in accessing positive opportunities a high priority. Specialized staff interact with the youth on a daily basis, channelling them through appropriate education and offering complementary services to enable them to get their lives onto a positive path. On a different level, through its participation in international projects, FCC places young people in the centre of attention when examining themes such as gender equality, in order to educate the young in societal issues.

3. Centre for Prevention and Therapy for the Child and its Family (Κέντρο Πρόληψης και Θεραπείας για το Παιδί και την Οικογένειά του, Παιδικά Χωριά SOS).

The Centre was founded by “SOS Children’s Villages” in 1999, as a social centre providing services to children and adolescents who live on or under the poverty line and their families, or who may be going through a crisis, and it aims to provide information, prevention and therapy.

Its activities include:

- The diagnostic examination of children who are about to enter the SOS Children’s Villages
- The psychological support of children who live in SOS Children’s Villages
- Working together with SOS Mothers
- Social research programmes in the area of Kypseli (inner city Athens), investigating children in crisis and their families

- Information and prevention services to facilitate families in crisis management
- Working together with schools, local authorities, Welfare services, hospitals and judicial authorities
- The organization of seminars and events for single parent families and other groups of the local area.

The Centre is staffed with specialised personnel, consisting of social workers, psychologists, and support teachers and it offers social, psychological and educational support and speech therapy as well as material support to more than two hundred children.

4. Institute of Social Protection and Solidarity (Ινστιτούτο Κοινωνικής Προστασίας και Αλληλεγγύης, ΙΚΠΑ).

The Institute in its current form was founded by law in 2005 (Law.3370/2005), and is the latest mutation of the older National Organisation of Social Care (EOKF), later on renamed as National Council of Social Care (ESYKF). With this founding law, the IKPA is outlined as an institution of research, evaluation, documentation, education and specialised applications in the field of social policy, and it is designated as the main scientific tool of support for the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity in the configuration and application of its policies and programs.

The Institute's activities include:

- Research on and evaluation and documentation of specific practices and innovative actions and initiatives in the field of social policy
- The dissemination of good practices, especially in relation to the training and continuing education of staff in social solidarity agencies
- The promotion of social dialogue
- The Institute's remit includes:
- The provision of advisory services to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity on research matters relating to social protection and solidarity
- The execution of field and desk research for the Ministry
- The management of 5% of the annual profits of the state lottery for the development of research in the field of social protection and solidarity

- The evaluation of applied policies and programmes

5. Institute of Child's Health (Ινστιτούτο Υγείας του Παιδιού, ΙΥΠ).

The Institute's Family Section is designated to:

- study the family function and social structures and institutions which allow the development and reproduction of family violence.
- provide counselling to professionals on family violence
- aid the development and promotion of health in the context of community structures
- develop interventions and proposals of social policy for the support of the family, the protection of children and the promotion of children's rights
- develop specialised clinical work on issues of family violence

The Institute's main activities include research and clinical studies on the sexual violation of children, on the identification of parameters of high risk leading to the abuse and neglect of children in Greece, and on eating disorders. Sociological research is also carried out on the role of physical punishment in children's education in Greece, as well as on professional attitudes and knowledge regarding child abuse and neglect. The Institute carries out projects on the promotion and protection of children's rights in Greece and Europe, on the development and promotion of health in socially excluded communities, and studies on and interventions in children's shelters. It also provides educational and counselling services to professionals and organisations on how to manage cases of child abuse and neglect.

6. Research Centre for Gender Equality (Κέντρο Ερευνών για Θέματα Ισότητας, KETHI)

The Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI) was established in 1994. KETHI is supervised and funded by the General Secretariat for Equality of the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation. The basic aims of KETHI's activities have a dual focus: to conduct social research on gender equality issues and to improve women's status and enable their advancement in all areas of

political, economic and social life, within the framework of the policies defined by the General Secretariat for Equality.

The Centre's main objectives are:

- To conduct and carry out research and scientific studies on gender equality
- To provide documentation and information on issues regarding gender equality in employment, entrepreneurship, and social integration
- To inform and advise women wishing to integrate into the labour market
- To sensitise, educate, and train agencies, groups, organisations, and individuals regarding gender equality
- To undertake initiatives promoting gender equality, particularly in multi-cultural settings
- To plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate projects promoting gender equality
- To raise awareness of gender equality by printing and publishing studies, research, and other informational material and through the production of audio-visual material
- To support experimental institutions working for women's empowerment and equal participation

The Centre's activities include:

1) Information and Counselling Centres for Women's Employment, Entrepreneurship and Social Integration in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Heraklion and Volos, addressing:

- Unemployed women wishing to integrate or re-integrate into the labour market
- Employed women threatened by unemployment
- Women wishing to set up a business
- Women facing problems of social exclusion
- Women requesting information and counselling regarding issues on social integration or reintegration, career orientation, employment, legislation
- Women in need of legal aid

2) A Documentation Department that:

- Organizes and develops multiple databases

- Processes and disseminates statistical data and information on issues pertaining to women's rights and to gender equality policies
- Provides information on: projects, studies, publications and issues on gender equality
- Drafts the periodical report on female employment situation in Greece (CEDAW)

7. Greek Centre of Mental Hygiene and Research (EKEPSYE, Ελληνικό Κέντρο Ψυχικής Υγιεινής και Ερευνών, ΕΚΕΨΥΕ)

The Greek Centre of Mental Hygiene and Research is a private non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1956 in Athens, and is funded and overseen by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. It is currently the largest provider of community mental health services in Greece.

The Centre's services include the provision of Child Health and Educational Services and of Units for Adolescents. These provide diagnostic and therapeutic services to children and adolescents, from two to nineteen years of age.

- Diagnostic services include psychiatric and psychological evaluation, evaluation of intelligence (R. Tenan Merrill, WISC – III tests), evaluation of educational skills (Athina test), and evaluation of personality (CAT, MMPI).
- Therapeutic interventions include:
 1. Supporting and advisory interventions and therapeutic follow-up of children, adolescents and their families, of short or long duration.
 2. Individual therapies
 3. Group therapies
 4. Family therapies

The team of professionals consists of child psychiatrists, psychologists, speech therapists, a sociologist and social workers. Moreover, the organisation grants a one year specialisation in Child Psychiatry.

8. Centre for Community Mental Health of Vyronas – Kaisariani (Κ.Κ.Ψ.Υ, Κέντρο Κοινωνικής Ψυχικής Υγιεινής Βύρωνα – Καισαριανής, Ψυχιατρική Κλινική Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών, Κ.Κ.Ψ.Υ)

The Centre for Community Mental Health, which is part of the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Athens, was founded in 1979, following an epidemiological research on the frequency and consequences of psychological illness in the local authorities of Vyronas and Kaisariani in Athens. It offers its services to the residents of the two boroughs free of charge.

The Centre offers the following services:

- Mental Health services for adults, including therapeutic intervention groups, Community centre of day care, and a centre of vocational rehabilitation (including sheltered workshops and supported vocational training)
- Mental Health services for children and adolescents
- Community preventive health and education group

The children and adolescents' mental health division has been in operation since 1982, and has attended to more than 3 000 cases since. The centre offers first multidisciplinary diagnosis, and then, depending on the diagnosis, offers counselling and support services to the family, individual child therapy and mediation services on the part of the child and its family to the school. It also offers special therapies for the treatment of learning difficulties, speech therapy and it designs and carries out activities of community information and information for the promotion of mental health and research projects on children's and adolescents mental health.

9. Single Parents' Association (Σύλλογος Μονογονεϊκών Οικογενειών)

The Single Parents' Association is a grass roots organisation, founded by a group of single mothers who were attending a training seminar for unemployed women to facilitate their inclusion in the job market under the auspices of the 2nd Community Support Framework. The Association's was recognised by law in 2001. The Association's activities include the collection of knowledges from a grass roots perspective on the frequency of the phenomenon of single parent families in Greece and on the living conditions and particular social and economic problems faced by single

parent families, the promotion of financial, welfare and educational policies supporting single families in co-operation with all relevant agents of local and central governments, and the participation in research projects pertaining to those issues.

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WEBSITES

www.barnardos.org.uk

A charity providing services to children and express commitment towards establishing the means whereby perspectives and participation by children and young people are embedded in the way the organisation works

www.byc.org.uk

An umbrella organisation in the UK for youth organisations, run by young people for young people.

www.changemakers.org.uk

A youth led learning programmes, grant schemes and volunteering initiatives stimulate enterprising minds, motivate active citizens and educate future leaders.

www.childrens-express.org

Children's Express is a UK-wide news agency producing news, features and comment by young people for everyone.

www.crae.org.uk

Promoting the status and lives of all children in England, through implementing the UNCRC.

www.the-childrens-society.org.uk

Work with children in over 100 projects covering children's participation.

www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn

An action plan to implement the government's core principles on involving children and young people.

www.everchildmatters.gov.uk

The government's strategic approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. to promote agencies and individuals to work together and to involve children and young people in more of a say about issues that affect them as individuals and collectively.

www.ncb.org.uk

The National Children's Bureau promote the interests and well being of all children across every aspect of their lives

www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

New Deals for Communities is a major government initiative to tackle multiple deprivation in deprived communities. Local Strategic Partnership's are single, non-statutory, multi-agency partnerships matching a local authority boundary, which aim to bring together at a local level public, private, voluntary and community sectors

www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright

Hear by Right is a standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people.

www.participationworks.org.uk

An online gateway for information on children and young people participation giving access to policy practice, networks and information from across the UK

www.surestart.gov.uk

Sure Start is the government programme to deliver the best start in life for every child. We bring together, early education, childcare, health and family support.

www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

This organisation aims to give the young people of the UK, between the age of 11 and 18 a voice, which will be heard and listened to by local and national government, providers of services for young people and other agencies who have an interest in the views and needs of young people.

www.young-voice.org

An apolitical organisation composed of representatives aged between 11-18 elected by their peers from across the UK.