

## SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY IN THE DISCOURSE OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** The social and economic restructuring in Russia has led to transformation in views on contemporary demographic policy, which has triggered certain changes in the institutional and moral-ethical norms and traditions of the modern family. The purpose of the empirical study was to examine the impact of family relationships and family status on the process of socialization and formation of a child's personality. The authors describe the revealed basic trends in the development of a modern single-parent family, typical patterns of behavior demonstrated by males and females raised in single-parent families, features specific to the process of socialization in a modern family, risk factors that hinder successful targeted socialization, the major problems faced by a single-parent family, as well as possible ways to mitigate the implications.

**Keywords:** family institute, single-parent family, value orientations, demographic situation, social policy, model of family relationships, socially responsible parenthood.

### 1 Introduction

The problems of modern family and marital relationships are not new to the global community.

The social and economic development of modern society cannot be imagined without interactions between individuals and between societal spheres with other socio-economic systems and states (Rodionova et al., 2017; Starovojtova et al., 2020). A huge variety of different spheres of social life in conjunction forms a single system that functions and develops according to the universal laws of social development (Weber, 1993). But these laws apply in a particular historical setting, so the result may not be consistent with expectations.

Moreover, since a human may exert influence on this setting, it is in his power to influence and change it directly and purposefully (Akvezba et al., 2018). When we speak about the socio-economic or political sphere of people's life, these are the systems that a human may change for his own benefit and for the benefit of the society (Goffman, 1963).

The fundamental pillar of any society is its socio-economic system, which has an effect on other spheres of life of modern society (Akvezba et al., 2019). In the context of our study, family is the main source of social and economic prosperity of the country, since it is the most important social institution, a springboard for the formation of spiritual and moral core, psychological support, character building and education. Family for a child is the most important social environment (Bokum, 2006), where a child acquires (internalizes) the model of family relationships, which he/she will use in future to build own family model (Bashkirova, 2007).

Multiple changes of old models and the emergence of new social norms lead to the transformation of one of the most important social institutions (Znaniacki, 1954). The family performing an aggregating function absorbs all changes occurring in social life, and thus is its reflection and driving force.

### 2 Literature Review

Family issues have always been of interest to researchers and have been examined in various dimensions of social and political relations (Bim-Bad, 2002). Thus, the founder of modern psychoanalysis Z. Freud, whose contribution to the study of the phenomenon of family was very substantial, regards it as a special "sphere of mental reality" (Pedagogical terminological dictionary, 2006).

As noted by A. I. Antonov and V. M. Medkov (2006) in Family Sociology, Adler sees family as a miniature reflection of society

and well-being and stability of family are crucial to the integrity of society as a whole. In the works of some researchers, the social institution of family is regarded as a reflection of culture and thus its miniature representation (Gozman & Aleshina, 1995). Some academic and research papers are exploring family and marital relationships in an effort to gain a profound insight into the problems of a modern family and to find possible solutions. The psychological and pedagogical framework of parent-child relationships in family is described by V. E. Kagan (1992); the typologies of family relationship styles and socialization in the family were scrutinized by I. Lahmeyer and Z. Matejček (1984). The problems of personal socialization in the family and society were also of interest to the foreign scientific community (Parsons & Bales, 1955), the interest to the problem of changing social structure and its transformation continues unabated (Merton, 1938).

A frequently discussed problem of value orientations forming (formedness) in modern society, which is often discussed today, is of great importance (Parsons & Bales, 1955). The system of values not only characterizes an individual in terms of maturity, but also expresses a meaningful attitude to the surrounding reality, which ultimately determines the degree of integration in society and motives behind actions (Vygotsky, 1984). Researchers have found a certain relationship between a person's system of fundamental values and socialization.

Today, development of a system of social services permits to project a targeted influence on families in order to diminish the scope of their problems and help them overcome difficult life situations. To this effect, well-organized social work in family offers a large arsenal of opportunities for correction, support and psychological assistance, thus contributing to strengthening of the institution of single-parent and problem families and improving their social status and material well-being.

Any social transformations, economic reforms and other challenges of modern life undoubtedly destabilize all spheres of social life, but, first of all, they affect the family (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Specialists who explore the problems of single-parent families point out that two-parent families have much more success in tackling the faced problems. Despite obvious urgency of the problem under scrutiny, its coverage is insufficient, which presents us *a goal* to reveal the features specific to the development of the social institution of family through a specially organized state family policy. At the same time, we believe that the main *objective* is to determine the magnitude of influence rendered by country's social and demographic development on the family policy in Russia.

The steady upward trend in the proportion of single-parent families is becoming increasingly alarming today (Frolov, 1999). For deep understanding of this process, its underlying causes should be examined. Special studies looking into the growing number of single-parent families show that the main reason for their emergence is divorce. Due to their growing number and no further remarriages, they are becoming a mechanism that diminishes the importance of marital relationships in general.

According to researchers, the most frequent causes of marriage termination are infidelity, alcoholism, and bad habits (Reznik, 1996). The shift in the value orientations of the modern society from treating divorce as shameful and condemned by society, and sometimes forbidden, towards liberal, almost indifferent attitude and no condemnation by the society and the state has made it more common. Today, it is not yet clear what effect the low moral-ethical responsibility of parents entering into a marriage on the basis of short-term relationships will have.

The share of children born out of wedlock in total births is increasing (Levkovich & Zuskova, 1985). Such families are referred to as mono-parental or unmarried parenthood and their number keeps growing. At the turn of the 20th and 21st

centuries, the birth of a child out of wedlock by a woman was in most cases a very conscious step towards motherhood (Kagan, 1992). But this posed a threat to such a family because of unforeseen circumstances related to the health of a sole breadwinner, high mortality rate among men of active childbearing age, which leads to widowhood and orphanhood. The urgency of the need to study this social category is clearly illustrated by statistics, thus, in 2019 there were 14.3% of single-parent families in Europe, and 17.4% in Russia (Statistics on single-parent families in Russia, 2019).

### 3 Research Methodological Framework

The object of our research is a single-parent family. The research subject is the upbringing in a single-parent family.

The research purpose was to reveal the particular effects of growing up in a single-parent family, and how single-parent family affects the child's model of family relationships.

Single-parent family is a family comprised of a single mother (single father) with a child (children), a divorced woman (divorced man) with a child (children), a widow (widower) with a child (children). This type of family is primarily characterized by broken connections and impaired system of relationships between family members. Researchers distinguish three types of modern family. Kinship (complex) family comprised of relatives, their spouses and children. This family type is quite rare today. The second family type is a nuclear (mass) family comprised of one married couple. It is characterized as a family having few children. This is the most common type of modern family, which exists quite autonomously and independently.

To analyze statistics indicating the growth in the number of single-parent families, we turned to the results of the 2017 census. According to the census data, the share of single-parent families in Russia was 17.4%, of which 12.1% were maintained by a single mother, and 1% by a single father (Operational indicators for the period from 1945 to 2020). By the reasons of occurrence of this or that family, the following major types of single-parent families have been distinguished: extramarital; orphaned; divorced; broken.

A distinction is also made between father-headed and mother-headed households; the latter constitute an absolute majority among single-parent households.

One of the most common reasons for the emergence of single-parent families is low stress resistance and low moral preparedness of parents for the difficulties caused by the addition of a child to the family (Palagina, 2005).

Single parenting produces certain effects: a shift in social functions and social roles and a distortion of the gender model of behaviour.

The study held in spring 2020 on the basis of the Department of Humanitarian Sciences and Technologies of Tyumen Industrial University relied on the questionnaire survey as a basic research method. It was an online questionnaire survey among volunteers of different sexes, ages, and marital statuses. In total, 2,000 residents from different regions across Russia took part in the survey. The survey was held on an underlying assumption that if a child was living until the age of 14 with both biological parents, the family is classified as full. If for some reason, one of the parents was absent before the age of 14, a child is viewed as having grown in a broken family.

The research objectives included, first, identification of the main parenting trends; second, identification of the preferred pattern of behavior within a family; third, identification of motivation for creation of own family and preservation of family relationship; fourth, identification of effects on the educational potential of a single-parent family and, consequently, fulfillment by a single-parent family of the social function and the social order from the community.

In addition to questions for collecting standard personal information, some more specific questions were asked. Some questions promoted open answers. The main lines of questionnaire survey were as follows.

1. Has your family represented a positive model of relationship between parents for you?
2. How often have you witnessed aggression between parents (your parent and his/her partner)?
3. What impact do you think this has had on you?
4. At what age do you plan to build your own family?
5. What was a family family you grow up with until the age of 14 (according to the classification provided in the survey description)?
6. Did you grow up in a family with older siblings?
7. What is that you lacked while growing up in a single-parent family (e.g. attention, material support, self-confidence and confidence in the surrounding world)?
8. Do you have any fears that you may repeat the fate of your parents?
9. May a single-parent family be fully functional?

### 4 Results and Discussion

The research results indicate that only 21.7% of respondents grew up in single-parent families and for 58.7% of respondents, families in which they were raised represented a positive family model for them.

It should be highlighted that some survey participants who grew up in single-parent families noted that they experienced material and domestic difficulties and educational problems. The psychological climate in a single-parent family is largely determined by the painful feelings induced by the loss of one of the parents.

The majority of single-parent families emerge after departure of a father. That is why sometimes women unconsciously project their frustration with their ex-husband onto a child. In some cases, the mother seeks to make up for the lack of paternal care by giving extra care and tenderness to a child. In all such situations, the family atmosphere has a negative impact on the development of the child's personality. Besides, a child in a single-parent family is deprived of a possibility to obtain a good pattern of gender-appropriate behavior.

The boy does not get a possibility to observe the male behavior of the nearest role model and unwittingly adopts female traits. The mental and sexual development of a girl in a single parent family is also full of contradictions. Often children from single-parent families, compared to their peers from full families, have lower performance at school, are more prone to neurotic disorders and wrongful conduct. However, this does not mean that a single-parent family is always dysfunctional, and 69.6% of respondents agree with that.

It is also conspicuous that 29.5% of respondents said yes to the question "Do you have any fears that you may repeat the fate of your parents?" addressed to those survey participants who grew up in a single-parent family. While, 58.7% of them plan to build their own family when they reach the age of 25, and 13% of respondents have no plans whatsoever to create the unit of society.

The conducted research shows that the problem of personality development in a single-parent family exists and is of high concern.

Below are the answers of the respondents illustrating how aggression between their parents affected them: "I gained an understanding that marriage and family are not so easy, that it is a daily job"; "I can't say how it affected me, but I felt scared in childhood"; "Negatively. On the one hand, I am aggressive myself sometimes. On the other hand, plenty of fears and complexes developed."; "The early realization that neither perfect family nor perfect relationship exists"; "It's so unpleasant, I'll try my best to make sure that this does not happen with my

family, or is minimized"; "I realized that for the role of a life partner I should choose someone who treats me respectfully; and not be guided by the principle "heart knows no law, I will love him the way he is", but examine scrupulously all the pluses and minuses". "I gained precious experience how to avoid the same mistakes in the future in my own family"; "The quarrels had a negative impact on my psychological health".

So, a single-parent family, although encountering certain objective difficulties, nevertheless has sufficient potential to raise children in a fully functional way. Therefore, parents who have lost their attachment to each other and live together only because of their children often make this sacrifice in vain. And a child witnesses a negative model of relationship between parents. This, from 15.2% to 4.3% of respondents quite often and regularly observed aggression between parents.

A parent who becomes the head of a single-parent household should soberly realize psychological implications of this situation and prevent its negative effects.

Socio-economic transformations and factors having revolutionary influence not only on the economic setting, but also on social qualitative changes in value orientations of the modern society, could not but affect life strategies of the institution of marriage and modern family trends. They can be traced in the results of research of the main demographic processes, i.e. declining birth rates, population ageing, growing dependency burden, migration, growing proportion of divorces and single-parent families, lower number of children in families and their nuclearization.

## 5 Conclusion

A single-parent family performs a number of socially important functions, and remains a functional social institution and socialization agent, but it encounters certain objective difficulties and educational potential of the families of this category is not always sufficient.

The basic subject of the family is a parent, and as such, he/she should have a strong sense of self and possess certain knowledge about the psychological and social complications that will occur in a single-parent family...

Family has always been of interest for researchers, thinkers, and philosophers as the main social institution that has a capacity to raise a personality with inherent spiritual and moral qualities. Considering special conditions of a family, where a child is born and raised, generations change and the human race continues, it is always in the center of society's interests and one of the key topics in the modern discourse on the role and development of family relationships, their value and solidness of family traditions.

Social value of a family lies in the moral and ethical goals that are pursued by the social system in which it exists. Creation of a healthy family with the right values is one of the main goals of any society. Given today's interpersonal and inter-state intricacies on the way to the world of justice, kindness and understanding, family has to overcome many different problems that sometimes have a destructive effect on it.

In this sense, a single-parent family is the most exposed. According to researchers, more than 12% of all families are single-parent (Biryukova et al., 2019). This is a rather high proportion, which in view of all other factors destructive to the family, is indicative of dysfunctionality in this social sector. The existence of single-parent families is not fatal in itself a priori, but in the presence of aggravating circumstances, solo parenting may have an extremely negative impact on the unfolding family situation.

Researchers characterize this category of people as deprived of a fulfilling spiritual and moral life and, as a rule, experiencing financial hardship. According to scientists, on this soil a family

model develops which is later used by a child to build its own family.

Family-marital relations by their nature are meant to lay a solid and healthy spiritual and moral foundation for the next generations, deprived of complexes and inferior (in many cases) living conditions (adults who do not have their own family).

The change in political system followed by economic restructuring could not but have affected the priorities of the modern family. The current Russian social policy is promoting strong family relationships and responsible parenthood.

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