

**SINGLE PARENT FAMILY:
SOME CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE
RESPONSE OF THE SERVICES
FROM ARAD, TO ITS NEEDS**

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Abstract: Family faces a series of various issues nowadays such as: poor stress management and enormous pressure, poor communication with children, shortcomings, juvenile delinquency issues, little time spent with the family and disfunctionality brought about by disability. Ranked as fundamental institution in a society, family has constantly been on the agenda of social policies, legislative regulations, trying to protect family on various levels and dimensions: policies which encourage child birth, benefits which support single-parent families, ensure Guaranteed Minimum Income, etc. In this paper we will refer to a special situation of vulnerability, namely single-parenthood. We would like to highlight the issues/pressure the single parent and the child is subjected to. WE have also tried to identify the social services available to single-parent families in Arad City.

Keywords: social services, single-parent families, social policies.

Introduction

Much has been spoken lately about contemporary family with some kind of sympathy. It is said that family experiences a crisis, its portrait looking gloomy. Families consisting of husband, wife and child (rarely children) or mother and child (because many women want a child of their own even if it doesn't have a father) or two mothers and children experience certain situations they don't find an answer to or don't know how to approach them.

Our daily haste, the multitude of events that succeed in our lives along with numerous tasks at work, at home or by relation to people around us lead to stress, overwhelming workload, and impossibility to cover all tasks related to a certain status. Even though modern family has undergone through real changes in terms of parental role in child education, the mother remains the parent who takes responsibility to raise and educate children. Thus, mothers play a leading role in child education while fathers have a supporting educational role (Stănciulescu, 2002).

There are numerous criteria which make the difference between temporary and permanent single-parent families and two-parent families. These criteria refer to the number of family members, the parents' status, their actual involvement in child raising, etc. (R. Hidd, 1986, Gongla, Thompson, 1985 apud Voinea, 2012). The complexity of situations which can lead to ranking a family as single-parent family places family on different levels of difficulty. Therefore, if both parents, though separated, are involved in child raising or if the extended family takes over some of the responsibilities, the parent raising the child alone is likely to manage successfully this difficult situation. In this paper we are interested in the H Category (according to Thompson), namely the family where the single parent is *psychologically and interactional* involved in the child's life while the other parent has abandoned the family to to divorce, death, disappearance etc.

In terms of ranking single-parent families to the beneficiaries of social services, we consider that it would be appropriate to take into consideration the parent's educational level (which induces high parental abilities), his professional status, namely employed or not, and thus the social status of the family. Consequently, we believe that there is a major difference between single-parent families in risk situations (poverty, school dropout, abandonment) and single-parent families with income above the average with high social expectations (due to a secure and decent job, house and school the child attends). The support for the second category is reduced to psychological counselling. Services such as respite-type centres, kids clubs after school gratuity etc. are neglected by this category .

Short insight into social policies for families in Romania

The constantly changing legislation of Romania places the family among the top groups benefiting from social protection. The measures implemented to protect the family are grouped according to the areas they target:

- higher birth rates and providing necessary conditions for child raising and care in the family;
- limitation or elimination of social exclusion and marginalization risks;

The first category of legislative acts contains measures referring to child-raising allowance (E.O. no 158/2005 and amendments), support for child-raising (Law 277/2010 on granting support allowance for families). In this category fall also the regulations to protect children with disabilities (Law no 448/2006). They offer solutions to support families in raising children by allocating financial compensations and sick leave to care for disabled children.

The second category of legislative acts supports issues such as poverty (Law no 416/2001 on the guaranteed minimum income), situations of need (disasters, fires, accidents), single-parent families, etc. Another Law (Law no 263/2007) support families in child raising and care up to the age of 3 by creating and organizing nurseries.

The legislation in the field of child protection refers to alternative services, to institutionalization and namely, to services which function in the family`s best interest:

- a) day centres;
- b) counselling and support centres for parents;
- c) social and support centres for re-adaptation of children with mental and social issues;
- d) monitoring, social and support services for pregnant women under child abandonment risk.

All four above listed services target more issues faced by the family and they cover some needs according to the frequency and diversity they emerge within a community.

Order No 24/2004 on the Approval of Minimal Compulsory Standards for day-care centres regulates the conduction of the following activities in day-care centres:

- Personalized intervention programme
- Children`s daily schedule
- Educational activities
- Recreational and socializing activities

- School and professional orientation and psychological counselling. Parental counselling and support

The Minimal Compulsory Standards for parental and child counselling and support are stipulated by Order no 289/2006; according to the Order, the centres provide information and keep efficient relationships with the community, its clients benefiting from integrated interventions through case management methods. Consequently, each family is provided with a personalized counselling plan which aims at supporting parental education.

Some details about single-parent families

Single-parenthood has become a fairly normal phenomenon lately, designating a parent who raises a child/children by him/herself. Literature (Stănciulescu, 2002, p.137) mentions a true insight into the history of the name “one-parent” family; from “isolated parents” to “women-lead household”, “single-parent households”, etc. It has been agreed to use the collocation *single-parent family* which doesn't involve any offending connotation such as “single mums in difficulty” that was used at a certain point. Romanian legislation defines single-parent family as “ a family with a single person and the dependent children who live with it” (Law no 277/2010 on the allowance for family support, art.2, (2)). This denomination is as clear as possible and frames several situations such as; divorced woman and her children, widow and her children, single woman and her children, who can be adopted or biological.

It is interesting to find out whether this situation is common or less common in Romania. If we refer to the age group over 20, the situation is the following: over 60% of people aged over 20 years are married, over 20% have never been married, a high percentage (12%) are widows or widowers, and the divorcees are over 5,4%. Almost 5% of the age group over 20 years live in cohabitation and 17% were divorced at the time of the census (INS, 2015).

Identified needs of single-parent families

Financial support

Sociology analyses single-parent families from three perspectives: vulnerability, efficiency of social policies and the consequences of family dissociation (Voinea, 2012). In this paper, the issue of single-parent family is approached with the aim of drafting the difficulties it faces but also of identifying the social services which address to it in Arad County.

Material wealth becomes an almost unachievable objective for the parent in a single-parent family. Depending on the specific situation, on the existence of support from personal networks and the environment, the parent who raises two children in Romania is very likely to fail in

covering all their needs. When referring to needs, we take into consideration both emotional and material ones, and also leisure activities, homework support, etc. Nowadays, caring for all these aspects has become an issues even for families with both parents. In single-parent families where the mother assumes more roles, some even contradictory, a gap can emerge. Mother`s absence due to job (maybe even two jobs) leads to frustration, to a distorted perception of mother-child relationship and the parental model offered by her. Consequently, the child enjoys her absence, considering that s/he is free and unattended. This situation brings about a series of issues, even deviance (lies, school absenteeism, theft, etc.) or delinquency.

In these cases, the mother harassed by all her responsibilities needs to set her priorities straight and as she is the only financial supporter of the family, she will probably focus on the financial wealth. Thus, educational activities with her children are postponed. The tumult of emotions both mother and children experience, associated with the mothers inability to fill the father`s role can lead to loss of control and even abandonment.

Single-parent families benefit from a double intervention in terms of family support policies. They receive financial benefits and also social services. The amount of financial support offered to single-parent families and both-parent families is revealed by the table below. It shows the amount of money given for family support allowance, which along with the social aid (guarantees the minimum income) are the most common financial benefits given to families in difficulty.

Families with incomes between 200 lei - 530 lei are financially supported through a family support allowance. Its amount and granting conditions are stipulated by Law no 277/2010 The below listed statistics is valid in Romania at this point and it is published by MMFPSPV (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly). When referring to single-parent families we notice that the financial aid is in the amount of 107 lei for families with one child, which is almost an insignificant amount.

Table no 1.
Amounts of family support allowance, 2016

Family Type	Monthly average net income per family member	Monthly amount in LEI according to the number of children			
		1 child	2 child	3 child	4 children or more

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Families with both parents	Under 200 lei	82	164	246	328
	Between 201 - 530 lei	75	150	225	300
Single-parent families	Under 200 lei	107	214	321	428
	Between 201 - 530 lei	102	204	306	408

Source: Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly

According to the same source (The Statistical Bulletin of M.M.F.P.S.P.V, 2015, p.12) the amounts paid for social work benefits from the state budget allocated to social work (for the time span January 1st – September 30th 2015) indicate the following situation:

- 34,2 % of the budget is allocated to the state allowance for children
- 27,2% of the budget is intended for benefits for the disabled
- 17,9% is directed to child-raising allowance
- 7,6%- social aid to ensure GMI (Guaranteed Minimum Income Law no 416/2001)
- 5,7% of the amounts paid for social work benefits aim the support allowance for families
- 3,3%- monthly placement allowance
- 2,4%- insertions stimulation
- 1,8% heating aid
- 0,1% emergency aids, refugee aids.

Therefore, the available measures aim a wide range of difficulty situations even if the financial support is not very consistent. 2477 families of Arad County benefited from family support allowance in 2015 (with amounts of 440.635 lei) with no difference between families with two parents and single-parent families. Other 2961 families were on the list for social aid payment (610.168 lei) (Country Report,2015, MMFPSPV).

The existence of extended family close to single-parent family can be the “salvation” because it can take over some of the expenses.

Needs to support the educational role

In the action plan for the implementation of Development Strategy of Social Services in Arad County (2014-2020), the first action refers to supporting a proactive dynamics in maintaining the unity of a

family. In this framework, DGASPC Arad has promoted prevention services according to different needs which have been identified in Arad County. 50 families shall benefit from individual counselling on various issues. Single-parent families are not specifically mentioned in the objectives of this strategy but they can be ranked as families in difficulty. Counselling can be given to a family according to a specific issue and it is provided along with other social services.

Table no 2.

Map of social services, Arad County

Type of difficulty	Centres (DGASPC- General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection și DDAC- Directorate of Development and Community Assistance)
Poverty, risk of abandonment	<p>The department for prevention of social exclusion / DGASPC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family planning and contraceptive education - Monitoring, assistance and support of the pregnant woman - Support and assistance for children in families at risk of family separation - Coordination and intervention on preventing child separation from his family - Anti-Poverty and prevention of social <p>Intercultural Social Complex Curcubeul/DDAC</p>
Risk of abandonment, or single mothers without support	<p>Maternity Centre Psychological, social, legal counselling to prevent separation of children from parents</p>
Separated families or placing children in PHC centers	<p>Center for Minors Crisis Center Family homes Family counselling to show responsibility towards children and their reintegration in family</p>

It can be noticed that most services are offered to dysfunctional families, affected by poverty where the abandonment risk is imminent. A profile of such beneficiaries is a family where the mother does not want the baby and uses no birth control even though she lives in improper

conditions; families with no financial resources to raise a baby or families with no parental abilities.

The difficulty of completing the educational role in a single-parent family can find an answer in the services offered by the Intercultural Social Complex “Curcubeu”. It has significant results in this area but it is the only centre in this town which focuses on taking over educational roles. It functions as an after school centre. The beneficiaries of the Intercultural Social Complex “Curcubeu” are children at risk of family abandonment and school dropout. . 200 children coming from dysfunctional families spend the afternoon in this centre in an efficient and proper manner. They find support for their home assignments and are also monitored to prevent school dropout.

The social impact of this centre in the community of Arad is very high because it significantly limits school absenteeism and school failure. The accessibility to the services of the multicultural complex is high. Thus, schools with children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are informed about the opportunity of benefiting from the services of the centre.

The Social Complex Curcubeu addresses to children up to the 8th grade. Educational activities, psycho-social intervention activities and leisure time activities are grouped on age groups (preschool, primary and secondary school children). For children who have dropped out school or have never been enrolled in schools (and exceeded the age limit), the centre provides courses for primary school so that they could enrol in secondary mainstream education.

There are 6 nurseries in Arad which care for little children and help single-parents.

There is also the “middle” family, where the school dropout and family abandonment issues are inexistent. The single parent makes enormous efforts to care for the family and the income covers the monthly expenses. The parent has a respectable social status but not an extraordinary financial comfort. The issues are similar to other single-parent families: insufficient time with the child, little supervision, unbalance, tension, etc. For this type of family there is another type of support: counselling, therapy for different issues, etc. These services are covered by the Services of Evaluation and Psychological Counselling.

The goal of the centre (<http://www.dgaspc-arad.ro/servicii-copii/evaluare-si-consiliere-psiologica>) is *the evaluation of psychological dimensions, emotional support, overcoming crisis situations and their consequences as well as the beneficiaries` ability to make changes to their lifestyle*. Here, families with children of different ages, especially single-parent families benefit from individual or group psychological counselling.

At national level, there were 35191 alternative services (counselling centres, parent support centres, centres for abandonment prevention through family planning, care for pregnant women) on September, 30th 2015. 19 611 of them are supported by city councils, 2674 are services offered by private organisations and 12906 belong to DGASPC. 56774 children are assisted by these organizations.

Conclusions

Single-parent family is at a dead end no matter which of the three dimensions of our analysis we refer to. Economic vulnerability is given by limited family income, hence the risk of poverty arises. The psychological costs are significant if we take into consideration the parents` and children`s suffering. There is a complex range of services for various family issues such as delinquency, disability, conflicts, emotional instability poverty etc. Single-parent families can benefit from these services according to the situation they experience. These services are offered for free by DGASPC or DDAC Arad.

Free psychological counselling offered by most centres is not enough completed by the activity of day care centres for children. Single-parent families not having support from their extended families face difficulty in doing leisure time activities, homework or child supervision. These are priorities for the single-parent who also misses from home. Learning strategies for communication and family reconciliation is not enough if there are no real solutions to solve the issue of child supervision.

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