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The problems faced by single mothers raising preschool children

Samotne matki dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym w obliczu trudności

Abstract

Introduction. Contemporary reality brings many challenges and social changes that have a significant impact on family life. One of these challenges is the increasing number of single mothers raising preschool-aged children. This trend, present in many societies worldwide, opens up a wide field for analysis and understanding the difficulties these women face on their life path.

Aim. Single mothers of preschool-aged children constitute a group that requires our attention and support, to provide them with stable and healthy conditions for the development of their youngest family members.

Methods and materials. This article presents research highlighting the issues that single mothers raising preschool-aged children face. The research was conducted through an online survey among 348 single mothers.

Conclusion. The analysis of the results obtained showed that contemporary single mothers encounter many difficulties. One of the main problems is the family's financial situation. The surveyed mothers have trouble securing steady employment. Therefore, the majority rely on financial support from social assistance centres. However, they believe that this assistance is insufficient, meeting only basic needs. Single mothers in the study struggle with a lack of time for themselves and their children, resulting from an overload of respon-

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sibilities. They are isolated, lacking assistance from others and can only rely on parents and extended family. Due to the absence of the father, their children exhibit many negative behaviours, most commonly rebellion and anger. The conducted research demonstrates that the lives of most single mothers and their children are still very challenging. Non-profit organizations, government programs, and the local community can play a significant role in improving the quality of their lives by offering appropriate financial, educational, and emotional support.

Keywords: single mother, preschool-aged child, needs, difficulties, support.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. Współczesna rzeczywistość przynosi ze sobą wiele zmian społecznych, które mają istotny wpływ na życie rodziny. Jednym z wyzwań jest rosnąca liczba samotnych matek wychowujących dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym. Ten trend, obecny w wielu społeczeństwach na całym świecie, otwiera szerokie pole do analizy i zrozumienia trudności, z jakimi te kobiety borykają się na swojej życiowej ścieżce. Samotne matki dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym stanowią grupę, która potrzebuje naszej uwagi i wsparcia, aby zapewnić im stabilne i zdrowe warunki rozwoju dla najmłodszych członków ich rodzin.

Cel. W artykule przedstawiono badania ukazujące problemy, z jakimi borykają się matki samotnie wychowujące dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym.

Metody i materiały. Badania przeprowadzono za pomocą internetowej ankiety wśród 348 samotnych matek.

Wyniki. Analiza uzyskanych wyników pokazała, że współczesne samotne matki napotykać na wiele trudności. Jednym z głównych problemów jest sytuacja materialna rodziny. Badane matki mają problem z podjęciem stałej pracy, dlatego też w większości korzystają ze wsparcia finansowego ośrodków pomocy społecznej. Uważają jednak, że pomoc ta jest niewystarczająca, zaspokajająca tylko podstawowe potrzeby. Badane samotne matki borykają się z brakiem czasu dla siebie i dziecka, wynikającym z nadmiaru obowiązków. Są osamotnione, pozbawione pomocy innych, mogą liczyć tylko na rodziców i dalszą rodzinę. Z powodu braku ojca ich dzieci przejawiają wiele negatywnych zachowań – najczęściej są to bunt i gniew. Przeprowadzone badania pokazują, że życie większości samotnych matek i ich dzieci jest nadal bardzo trudne. Istotną rolę w poprawie jakości tego życia mogą odegrać organizacje non-profit, programy rządowe oraz społeczność lokalna poprzez odpowiednie wsparcie finansowe, edukacyjne i emocjonalne.

Słowa kluczowe: samotna matka, dziecko w wieku przedszkolnym, potrzeby, trudności, wsparcie.

Introduction

Single motherhood is a unique journey for women who are raising their children without the presence of another parent. It is not only a life situation, but also a great emotional, financial, and social challenge. Single mothers are both the primary caregivers of their children, as well as their supporters and role models. They often face the challenges of supporting a family on a single income. Many have limited financial

resources, which can lead to difficulties in meeting their children's basic needs, such as food, healthcare, and education. The absence of a second parent can be very emotionally taxing for both the woman and the child. Single parenting often consumes all the mother's energy and time. She has to show great determination to cope with the daily challenges, make decisions and find support on her own, and this contributes to feelings of isolation and overload. Taking care of children, professional work and household duties leaves little time for rest and personal development. The perseverance of single mothers and their ability to cope with difficult situations is inspiring both for themselves and their children. The love they give their offspring is immeasurable. Their dedication to providing the best conditions for its development is the foundation of a strong family bond. Therefore, for many children, the single mother becomes the main role model. Children observe the strength, courage and determination of the mother, and through this, they learn values such as self-reliance, perseverance, and empathy.

Issues related to single parenthood

A lone parent, and therefore a single-parent family, is "a social group in which one parent, either the mother or the father, fulfils all the parental tasks aimed at both material security and housekeeping, raising children and tending the emotional bonds in the family" (Miłosz, 2009, p. 145). Causes of lone parenthood include divorce, separation, birth of a child out of wedlock, death of a spouse, and temporary absence of one parent. The majority of single-parent families are formed by single mothers who raise their child(ren) without or with limited participation of their spouse, due to his/her permanent or temporary absence (Danilewicz, Izdebska, & Krzesińska-Żach, 2001).

Sometimes it happens that a woman consciously decides to become a single mother because she is well-off and wants to fulfil the need to have a child and there is no place in her plans for a man (Szlama, 2011). There are also situations where a single woman wishes to become a mother and decides to adopt a child (Kwiatkowska, 2019).

Problems experienced by single mothers

There is a common perception that single-parent families are in a much worse financial and housing situation than full families. Difficulties exist in the economic sphere and financial shortages are usually of a long-term nature. They often last until the children become independent (Szymura, 2001).

Single mothers are also often not economically active, and this is not because they do not want to work, but because it is difficult for them to combine work and childcare. Potential employers often express their disapproval of single parenthood (Kamińska, 2002). In addition, lone mothers themselves often reject a job offer if it is a flexible shift, and therefore have a weaker position in the labour market. Their chances of finding a satisfactory job are slim. The phenomenon of unemployment is a very serious problem, as it can lead to poverty. This makes women feel punished by fate and isolated, which generates further negative circumstances in their lives. This trend is dangerous because nowadays, a child's development is largely determined by the family's financial capacity to enrol them in all kinds of extra-curricular activities, tutoring, language learning, etc. A difficult financial situation can also lead to savings being made on children's healthy nutrition and adequate rest. Missing out on holidays for several years for a child living in a big city can have serious negative consequences for their health. Poverty significantly limits a child's good start in life.

It is not only the excessive burden of responsibilities and the lack of help with childcare that is an obstacle to earning a living. It is also caused by a lack of acceptance of the own life situation and the adoption of a passive attitude towards the difficulties that arise. Passivity does not mean giving up the struggle to improve living conditions but being discouraged to seek help, e.g., from various organisations. It is also a lack of ability to find a solution that would provide a stable income that could lead to permanent family independence. This is also caused by external barriers (inability to provide childcare, lack of time, money to take up further training courses) as well as subjective difficulties (demanding attitude, lack of needed skills). Living with a constantly limited budget, unstable income and rising living costs can breed frustration and an anxious attitude towards the surrounding reality. This often results in the occurrence of dysfunctions in the family, resulting from, among other things, a strong focus on current material and living matters and less ability to properly recognise and meet the sociopsychological needs of the child (Raław-Markowska, 2001).

For a large group of single mothers, carving out time and strength for their personal development and education is out of reach, and sometimes even out of desire. The daily effort of caring for children, of trying to compensate for an incomplete family, is a primarily mental effort, which contributes to a loss of physical strength and vitality and leads to a lack of time to care for oneself, to look after own beauty, to think about oneself and one's needs. Many of these women, in such circumstances, lock themselves away and spend time analysing family income and planning frugal purchases and investments. The poor mental state is exacerbated by social isolation and reduced social interactions (Kamińska, 2002).

The negative social effects of family incompleteness can to some extent be alleviated by the mother's professional position and prestige. Women, especially divorced women, are characterised by a high potential to increase their professional qualifications (Lachowska, 1998).

Some single mothers, to fill the void caused by the absence of a partner, give up the realisation of their personal needs and aspirations in favour of the family, and look for the meaning of life in the success of the child. Maternal tenderness is combined with a desire to replace the absent father for the child. The single mother is excessively focused on the offspring. Too much emotional attachment to the child can lead to adverse changes in the child's socialisation process, e.g., a retardation in the attainment of social and emotional maturity. A single mother's excessive emotional concentration on the child results from anxiety and excessive concern for the offspring (Lachowska, 1998).

A lone mother has a right to be afraid about many things – about what will happen tomorrow, about the future of her child, about whether she will be able to cope with raising her child, whether she will be able to cope materially, what the reaction of those around her will be, whether she will lose her friends. These are all very common and legitimate concerns. A single parent is right to feel grief, sadness, and disappointment. In addition to anxiety, he or she is plagued by other strong feelings, often ones that take away the will to live and the strength to confront the situation responsibly and with dignity (Lis, 2012).

Among the difficulties of single mothers is an excess of work and responsibilities, which makes them poorly aware of the problems experienced by their children. Allocating time to various household chores, mainly shopping, cooking, cleaning, and laundry, means that little time is left for contact with the child: playing, helping with learning, or talking about anything (Szymura, 2001). The busy woman, preoccupied with her business, instead of talking and playing with her child, buys another toy. In this way, she wants to compensate the child for the lack of closeness and time (Lis, 2012). The many responsibilities of work and housekeeping overwhelm the single mother. She becomes cranky and lacks patience and cordiality. This makes preschool children unwilling to eat on their own, wetting themselves, nervous and noisy, absent-minded, and difficult to coexist with. They develop attitudes of aggression, hostility, malice, stubbornness, selfishness, calculation and insensitivity, a tendency to loneliness, apathy, laziness, aversion to all effort, and weak will (Adamski, 2005).

The lack of a male role model causes children, especially boys, to have a distorted image of men, and this image can have feminine characteristics. This can generate many problems. Sometimes the mother wants to substitute for the father and begins to step into his role. To fill the void for the child, she does everything so that the child does not feel it (Napora, 2004).

Often a single mother expects her child to achieve what she has not achieved (Adamski, 2005). Frustrated, disappointed and disillusioned with her life, she compares her child's achievements with those of the child's peers (Lis, 2012).

Institutional forms of support for single mothers

Assistance to single mothers is implemented within the framework of state policy, i.e., all the interactions of institutions, social organisations, and associations undertaken for the benefit of the child and the mother in the local environment. It can have both an individual and a team character. The persons providing support are most often employees of institutions specialising in assisting (social workers, educators, psychologists, and therapists) and relatives, acquaintances, and neighbours. Social institutions assisting the child and family are defined as establishments or public or private services that provide diagnostic, informative, counselling, preventive, supportive (therapeutic) activities. Each of them facilitates the resolution of family problems in a specific area (Danilewicz et al., 2001). As well the family, they have an extremely important impact on the functioning of the child. Among the primary institutions that support the family and provide continuity of pedagogical interactions and care for the development and health of the young child are the nursery and kindergarten (Danilewicz et al., 2001). The cost of a child's stay in a nursery or kindergarten is much lower than hiring a childminder (Krajewska, 2009). According to the law, a single mother has priority in enrolling her child in a nursery or kindergarten and is entitled to subsidised lunches and reimbursement of the cost of excursions or extracurricular activities provided at the nursery (Krasa, 2019).

Single mothers can search for help in psychological-educational counselling centres, social assistance centres, crisis intervention centres, family support centres, associations, and other support institutions (Lis, 2012).

Psychological-educational counselling centres are educational institutions which address the individual problems of single mothers and their children and provide various forms of therapy according to the identified needs. They carry out their tasks through consultation, intervention, psycho-education, mediation, and information activities. The use of the counselling centres is free of charge and voluntary (Lis, 2012).

In social assistance centres, a single mother, in a situation of various difficulties, can seek temporary and permanent help. For many women, social assistance is a guarantee for a better life. In addition to financial benefits, it also consists of comprehensive counselling, motivating single mothers to organise new forms of self-help or participate in already available forms.

Crisis intervention centres are multifunctional support places, assisting children and families who find themselves in a difficult situation as a result of a random event, family situation or difficult personal experience. The staff of such centres includes psychologists, therapists, educators, social workers, addiction therapists, and lawyers. The assistance provided is free of charge, anonymous and no referral is required from clients (Lis, 2012).

Family support centres are established to perform social welfare tasks, as well as to provide support to persons with disabilities with the help of funds from the PEFRON (*Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych* [State Fund for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled]). The main focus of the centres' activities is to provide such support to single mothers that will enable them to live independently, be socially active, fulfil their social roles effectively, develop, integrate and function in society and cope better with their problems (Lis, 2012).

The family court is an institution that covers all family problems with its assistance. Single mothers use this institution mainly in cases concerning the evasion of the father of the child from his child support obligation (Danilewicz et al., 2001).

Single mothers are supported by churches of different denominations. Support consists of family counselling, running single mothers' homes, organising summer camps for children, feeding children, and providing emergency material and food assistance (Danilewicz et al., 2001).

During moments of crisis, single mothers can make use of the Helpline. The professionals on duty work by listening attentively and talking to people who are experiencing moral, social and psychological difficulties, who are trying to overcome their loneliness, addictions, depression, a sense of hopelessness or who feel that the situation they are in is hopeless, or who are even considering suicide. The duty officers refer such a person to the relevant services and institutions and inform them of the options available to them to resolve the crisis. The principle is to listen without criticising or condemning, to be sympathetic, and to strictly avoid any religious, political or ideological pressure (Lis, 2012).

Single mothers with young children and pregnant women can find shelter and support in single mother's homes. In terms of care and support, lone mothers' homes provide basic care during the child's illness and care for the child when the mother is ill, health care services, help with personal matters if needed, and guarantee personal hygiene and cleaning products if the lone mother is unable to buy them herself (Krajewska, 2009).

According to the *Ustawa o świadczeniach rodzinnych* [Act on Family Benefits], a single mother can apply for several cash benefits, e.g., family allowance, the Family 500 + benefit, to which each child is entitled regardless of income, a childbirth allowance, a childcare allowance during parental leave, a special allow-

ance for single parenthood, and low-interest loans. These benefits can be obtained from the municipality, which also helps by allocating municipal or social housing. If the father of the child evades paying alimony and the enforcement of the ordered alimony is ineffective, the single mother can apply for benefits from the alimony fund. An unemployed single mother with a child under 7 years of age can also count on reimbursement of childcare costs when she starts working. A lone mother may also preferentially account for her child – thus benefiting from a lower tax rate (Brzostek, 2014).

Methodological basis of own research

The research involved single mothers bringing up children. The aim was to ascertain the difficulties encountered by single mothers raising preschool children. The research process was guided by the following research problems:

- What problems do single mothers of preschool children experience?
- What kind of support do the surveyed mothers receive from state institutions?

The research was conducted by a diagnostic survey method using an online questionnaire on Facebook and Messenger platforms. The survey contained 29 questions. The research was conducted from February to May 2023. A total of 348 women participated. There were 149 women from a rural background, which was 43% of the respondents, and 199 women from an urban background, which was 57%. The respondents were of different ages. The data in this regard are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The age of the mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Number of mothers					
		Urban environment		Rural environment		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Under 18 years	0	0	37	10.6	37	10.6
2.	18–26 years	27	7.8	36	10.3	63	18.1
3.	27–35 years	13	3.7	42	12.1	55	15.8
4.	Over 36 years	159	45.7	34	9.8	193	55.5
5.	Total	199	57.2	149	42.8	348	100

Source: Author's own study.

The data presented in Table 1 reveals that single mothers over 36 years of age (55.5%) were the largest group among the respondents. This was followed by mothers aged 18–26 (18.1%), 27–35 (15.8%), and mothers under 18 (10.6%). The age distribution of women from urban environments was similar, but there were no single mothers under the age of 18. In the rural environment, the majority were mothers aged 27–35 (12.1%). The other groups were of similar size (10.6%–9.8%).

The mothers surveyed had varied educational backgrounds. The data obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Education of the mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Number of mothers					
		Urban environment		Rural environment		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Higher	73	21.0	41	11.8	114	32.8
2.	Secondary	70	20.1	41	11.8	111	31.9
3.	Vocational	56	16.1	35	10.0	91	26.1
4.	Primary	0	0	32	9.2	32	9.2
5.	Total	199	57.2	149	42.8	348	100

Source: Author's own study.

According to the data presented in Table 2, the largest groups were lone mothers with higher education (32.8 %) and secondary education (31.9 %). Slightly fewer mothers had vocational education (26.1%) and the smallest group were mothers with primary education (9.2%). This tendency was similar in both groups.

In Table 3, the occupational status of the female respondents is presented.

Table 3
Occupational status of mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Number of mothers					
		Urban environment		Rural environment		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Student	0	0	16	4.6	16	4.6
2.	University student	24	6.9	15	4.3	39	11.2
3.	Unemployed	27	7.8	24	6.9	51	14.7
4.	Farmer	24	6.9	15	4.3	39	11.2
5.	Full-time employee	42	12.1	20	5.8	62	17.8
6.	Casual worker	29	8.3	17	4.9	46	13.2
7.	Self-employed	25	7.2	14	4.0	39	11.2
8.	Recipient of attendance allowance	0	0	14	4.0	14	4.0
9.	Part-time employee	28	8.0	0	0	28	8.1
10.	Contracted out	0	0	14	4.0	14	4.0
11.	Total	199	57.2	149	42.8	348	100

Source: Author's own study.

Based on the data in Table 3, it can be seen that the lone mothers surveyed were most often working full-time (17.8%), with a smaller group (14.7%) being unemployed. Slightly fewer lone mothers were in casual employment (13.2%), farming and self-employment, or studying (11.2% each). A minority of lone mothers were working part-time (8.1 %), studying (4.6 %), and working on a contract for work or living on nursing benefits (4.0 % each).

Problems faced by single mothers surveyed

Single mothers struggle with many difficulties. One of the main problems is the material situation of the family. Respondents were asked how they assessed their material situation. In response, 48.0% of single mothers (167 people) rated their material situation as average, 37.0% (129 people) as very good or good, and 15.0% (52 people) as bad or rather bad.

Next, respondents answered the question of whether being a single mother was a difficulty in getting a job. As many as 43.1% of the mothers (150 people) answered this question in the affirmative, while 17.0% of the respondents (59 people) were of the opposite opinion. In addition, as many as 39.9% of the respondents (139 people) stated that being a lone parent partly influenced the difficulty of taking up employment.

In the following question, the surveyed mothers were asked to list the reasons that caused problems in entering the workforce. The responses are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4
Reasons for difficulties in getting a job among single mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Number of mothers					
		Urban environment		Rural environment		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Lack of help with childcare	118	33.9	153	44.0	271	77.9
2.	Lack of opportunity to work full-time	49	14.1	66	19.0	115	33.0
3.	Lack of childcare during illness	10	2.9	38	10.9	48	13.8
4.	Discrimination by employers	24	6.9	0	0	24	6.9
5.	Lack of availability	73	21.0	14	4.0	87	25.0
6.	Overload of responsibilities	63	18.1	38	10.9	101	29.0
7.	Many stressful situations	10	2.9	0	0	10	2.9
8.	Lack of nursery school places	0	0	14	4.0	14	4.0
9.	Lack of education	0	0	24	6.9	24	6.9

Source: Author's own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

The data presented in Table 4 show that the most prevalent reason for lone mothers' difficulties in finding work was a lack of help with childcare (77.9%). Significantly fewer mothers indicated that they were unable to work full-time (33.0%), that they were overburdened with responsibilities (29.0%) and that they were not available (25.0%). The smallest groups were mothers for whom discrimination by employers and lack of education (6.9% each), lack of a nursery place (4.0%) and a lot of stressful situations (2.9%) were problems in getting a job.

Further to the survey, respondents were asked whether they had parenting problems with their children due to single motherhood. The affirmative answer was gi-

ven by 68.1% of the respondents (237 persons), with 31.9% (111 persons) having the opposite opinion. A consequence of the affirmative answers was the question of which parenting problems the surveyed mothers experience. The responses obtained are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Difficulties raising children of single mothers

No.	Answers	Number of mothers					
		Urban environment		Rural environment		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	With adaptation in kindergarten	38	16.0	59	24.9	97	40.9
2.	Rebellion, anger	77	32.5	118	49.8	195	82.3
3.	Lack of discipline	80	33.8	28	11.8	108	45.6
4.	Fear of people, withdrawal	77	32.5	28	11.8	105	44.3
5.	Poor relations with peers	38	16.0	59	24.9	97	40.9
6.	Hyperactivity	38	16.0	56	24.9	97	40.9

Source: Author's own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

The results of the study presented in Table 5 reveal that the children of single mothers most often demonstrate rebelliousness and anger (82.3%). Significantly fewer children show a lack of discipline (45.6%), fear of people and withdrawal (44.3%) or difficulties adapting in kindergarten, poor peer relations, and hyperactivity (40.9% each). The urban environment is dominated by children showing a lack of discipline (33.8%) whereas the rural environment is dominated by defiance and anger (49.8%).

Therefore, respondents were asked whether these behaviours could be a result of the lack of a father. To this question, 51.0% of the respondents (178 persons) answered in the affirmative, 26.0% (90 persons) were of the contrary opinion, and 23.0% of the respondents (80 persons) could not answer.

Another question addressed to single mothers was about whether the child feels inferior because of the absence of the father. To this question, 34.2% of the mothers (122 persons) answered in the affirmative, but slightly fewer, 31.5% (119 persons) answered in the negative, while 30.7% of the mothers (107 persons) had no opinion on this question. The mothers who answered this question in the affirmative used the following reasons:

- the child’s sadness during pre-school celebrations where other fathers are present;
- the child’s jealousy when seeing children playing with their father;
- negative attitudes towards the environment;
- withdrawal, shame, lack of self-confidence;
- stigma from peers because of the absence of the father;
- sadness when peers talk about the time they spent together, playing with their father;
- sadness and the grief of the child during family celebrations when seeing other full families;
- frequent questions about the father, the child says directly that he misses his father, and often cries for this reason;
- lack of a father’s love, a role model, a sense of security;
- attempt to get attention through negative behaviour.

A further stage of the study was to obtain information from lone mothers about difficulties in meeting their needs. The data in this regard is presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Difficulties of the mothers surveyed in meeting their needs

No.	Types of needs and problems	Number of mothers					
		High difficulty		Medium difficulty		Low difficulty	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Financial	82	46.1	36	20.2	60	33.7
2.	Emotional	73	41.1	36	20.2	69	38.7
3.	Lack of help from others	82	46.1	41	23	55	30.9
4.	Lack of a male role model	97	54.5	33	18.5	48	27
5.	Educational	53	29.8	45	25.3	80	44.9
6.	Loneliness	86	48.3	48	27.0	44	24.7
7.	In the workplace	73	41.0	55	30.9	50	28.1
8.	Overload of responsibilities	96	53.9	34	19.1	48	27.0
9.	Lack of time for oneself	108	60.6	22	12.4	48	27

Source: Author’s own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

The data presented in Table 6 show that the majority of single mothers surveyed have a problem with meeting the need to have time for themselves (60.6%). In addition, the difficulties are the lack of a male role model (54.5%), an excess of responsi-

bilities (53.9%), problems resulting from loneliness (48.3%), financial needs and lack of help from others (46.1% each), as well as emotional needs and career difficulties (41.4% each). Only the problems in meeting the educational needs of their children were described by most female respondents as small (44.9%).

In addition, individual respondents mentioned problems such as:

- health problems,
- bad attitude of teachers towards the child, failure to look for the cause of inappropriate behaviour,
- conflict between siblings for the father's attention,
- lack of a common front with the father in raising the children, the father shows up once a month and bribes the children with gifts,
- insufficient time devoted to the child,
- depression,
- lack of understanding from others,
- lack of time for leisure activities.

At the same time, 86.8% of the female respondents (302 persons) stated that they are often overtired by their duties, 11.2% (39 persons) rarely, and 2.0% (7 persons) do not feel tired for this reason. In addition, 54.0% of lone mothers (188 persons) declared that they spend far too little time with their children, 37.9% (132 persons) felt that the time devoted to their children was sufficient, while 8.1% of mothers (28 persons) had no opinion on this issue.

Single mothers were also asked who helps them with childcare. The data obtained are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Assistance to single mothers in caring for their children

No.	Answers	Number of mothers	
		N	%
1.	I have no help	52	14.9
2.	Caregiver	32	9.2
3.	Neighbours	34	9.8
4.	Other relatives	101	29.0
5.	Friends	70	20.1
6.	Parents	202	58.1
7.	Father of the child	28	8.1

Source: Author's own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

From the survey results in Table 7, it can be seen that lone mothers are most often helped with childcare by their parents (58.1%) and extended family (29.0%). In addition, they are helped by friends (20.1%), neighbours (9.8%), nannies (9.2%), and the child's father (8.1%). However, as many as 14.9% of lone mothers cannot count on help from others.

Assistance received by single mothers from state institutions

In the next stage of the research, female respondents were requested to indicate the institutions they use or have used in the past. Data in this field is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Type of institutions used by single mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Number of mothers	
		N	%
1.	I do not use	38	10.9
2.	Family court	63	18.1
3.	Psychological-educational counselling centre	73	21.0
4.	Church	24	6.9
5.	Helpline	24	6.9
6.	Poviat Family Assistance Centre	28	8.1
7.	Single mother's home	14	4.0
8.	Crisis intervention centre	24	6.9
9.	Social assistance centre	160	46.0

Source: Author's own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

Analysis of the data in Table 8 shows that the lone mothers surveyed most often receive support from social welfare centres (46.0%). A much smaller group of mothers obtain help from psychological-educational counselling centres (21.0%) and family courts (18.1%). A much smaller group of lone mothers receives help from county family assistance centres (8.1%), as well as from the Church, the Helpline, crisis intervention centres (6.9% each) and single mother's homes. Additionally, 10.9% of the lone mothers surveyed do not use any institutional help.

Mothers who use or have used institutional support were asked about the financial support they received. The data obtained are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9
Financial support provided to single mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Numbers of mothers	
		N	%
1.	Family allowance	208	60.0
2.	Childbirth allowance	218	62.6
3.	Childcare allowance during parental leave	90	25.9
4.	Single parent allowance	121	34.8
5.	Child-rearing allowance for large families	31	8.9
6.	Education and rehabilitation allowance for a disabled child	24	6.9
7.	School starter allowance	122	35.1
8.	Alimony from child support fund	94	27.0
9..	Alimony from the father of a child	170	48.9
10.	Housing allowance	14	4.0
11.	Pension following the death of the father	14	4.0
12.	Does not benefit from financial aid	21	6.0

Source: Author's own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

As shown in Table 9, the data presented in this table show that the lone mothers surveyed most often receive childbirth allowance (62.6%), child benefit (60.0%), and maintenance from the child's father (48.9%). Furthermore, some of them receive school start allowance (35.1%), single parent allowance (34.8%), alimony from the child support fund (27.0%) and childcare allowance during parental leave (25.9%). Some lone mothers also benefit from an allowance for raising a child in a large family (8.9%), from an allowance for the education and rehabilitation of a disabled child (6.9%) and from housing subsidies and a pension after the death of the father (4.0% each). Financial assistance is not used by 6.0% of the lone mothers surveyed.

The interviewed single mothers also benefited from material aid. The extent of this is shown in Table 10.

Table 10
Forms of assistance in kind provided to mothers surveyed

No.	Answers	Number of mothers	
		N	%
1.	Vouchers, food coupons	53	15.2
2.	Child nutrition in kindergarten	69	19.8
3.	Food parcels	52	14.9
4.	Clothing	41	11.8
5.	Subsidised holidays for children	31	8.9
6.	Does not benefit from material aid	174	50.0

Source: Author's own study. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents could answer more than one.

The results in Table 10 demonstrate that in-kind support was used by only 50.0% of the mothers surveyed. The most common support was food for children in kindergarten (19.8%), food vouchers and coupons (15.2%), food parcels (14.9%), clothing (11.8%), and subsidies for children's holidays (8.9%).

The final stage of the research was to obtain information from the female respondents on whether the assistance they received was sufficient for them. An affirmative answer was given by 34.2% of the mothers surveyed, while the vast majority of the respondents, 44.8% (156 persons), stated that the assistance provided to them was not sufficient. No opinion was expressed by 21.0% of the mothers (21 persons).

Mothers who stated that the assistance they receive is insufficient felt that:

- The institution's assistance only allows the child's basic needs to be met.
- Money from benefits can only be used for additional activities, e.g., swimming pool, English language.
- Subsidised housing and meals for the child allowed to function at the lowest level.
- Living and supporting a child is very expensive and benefits are too low.
- Income thresholds are not adequate for minimum income wages.
- Some laws are nonsensical.
- If a single mother is in a good financial situation and the father does not pay the ordered maintenance because he claims he cannot afford it, such a mother cannot get money from the maintenance fund, because her income is too high. The fact that the woman is coping means that the father of the children remains exempt and unpunished.

- Raising a child and taking care of the house is also work.
- There is an impression that single mothers are for institutions, not the other way around.
- A single mother who works several jobs and exceeds the income threshold is entitled to few benefits.
- Kindergartens are open for too short a time and parents working other hours have nothing to do with their child.
- Because I work, apart from 500+ I am not entitled to any benefit and help would make a lot easier.
- All benefits are minimal and only enough for fees. Aid is insufficient for someone who is raising a child alone and cannot work.
- State institutions are not always interested in the fate of single mothers, and so aid is insufficient.
- Children should have unrestricted access to educational institutions.
- More money from the state budget should be allocated to help single mothers.

Conclusion

Single motherhood is a complex phenomenon that requires a broad view and understanding. It is a challenging journey that testifies to extraordinary strength and determination. Single mothers are not only caregivers but also role models who shape future generations. It is therefore very important to appreciate and support these women in their difficult but beautiful role. Research and social activities are aimed at improving the situation of single mothers and their children.

Single mothers are a diverse social group whose experiences and challenges vary according to a variety of factors. Some women choose this life path and opt for parenthood without a permanent partner. Others become single mothers as a result of divorce, separation or the death of a partner. Single motherhood can also be the result of an unplanned pregnancy. It is important to recognise that each situation is individual and complex, and the reasons for lone parenthood can be different for each woman.

Single mothers often need to overcome numerous challenges. Financial strain, lack of support in daily parenting duties and feelings of loneliness are just some of the difficulties they experience. In addition, single mothers often have to reconcile work with their responsibilities towards their children, which can lead to chronic stress and fatigue.

Single motherhood also has an impact on children. Though each situation is different, research suggests that children raised in single mother families may be at greater

risk of experiencing emotional and social problems. However, it is important to emphasise that it is not lone motherhood per se that affects the fate of children, but rather the quality of the relationships and support children receive from their parents.

Crucial to improving the quality of life of single mothers and their children is the support offered to them. Non-profit organisations, government programmes, and the local community may have a vital role to play in providing them with financial, educational and emotional support. Social policies that take into account the specific needs of this group are also essential.

It is important to highlight the causes of single parenthood and the challenges it poses to single mothers. They need to be provided with adequate support so that they can create healthy and stable living conditions for their children. Single motherhood is not only an individual issue, but also a social issue that requires attention and action from society as a whole.

Based on the research conducted, it is important to formulate recommendations for state policy and pedagogical and social practice. State policy should be aimed at supporting single mothers in difficult situations and creating conditions for the development of their children, providing them with equal opportunities and eliminating the difficulties they encounter. This is important for building a fairer society and ensuring a better future for single mothers and their offspring. The following demands are crucial here:

- Financial support – adequate assistance programmes, social benefits, and maintenance payments so that mothers can provide a decent living for their children. These benefits should be paid in a timely and sufficient manner.
- Access to education – guaranteeing access to quality education, including pre-schools and nurseries, which will enable single mothers to work or develop their skills. Furthermore, access to educational support programmes to help children succeed in school.
- Vocational support – to provide training programmes and career counselling to help single mothers find a job or develop professionally to provide their family with an adequate source of income.
- Health care – enabling mothers and their children to have broad access to health care, including preventive services and psychological support.
- Flexible workplaces – introducing legislation to enable employers to offer flexible working options that allow single mothers to reconcile work and parenting responsibilities.
- Addressing discrimination – promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination that single mothers may face in the workplace.
- Supporting social network building – creating meeting places and support groups for single mothers where they can share experiences and find emotional support.

- Sex education – introducing sex education in schools on responsible relationships and family planning to counter single parenthood.
- Prevention of domestic violence – supporting programmes to prevent domestic violence and putting in place effective mechanisms to protect against it, providing legal support for victims of domestic violence and providing safe shelters for them.
- Psychological support – providing access to psychological support and therapy for single mothers to help them cope with their emotional difficulties.
- Educational campaigns – conducting social and educational campaigns to eliminate stereotypes and counteract the stigmatisation of single mothers.

Pedagogical practice is important for single mothers, as it can influence children's development and support women in their difficult circumstances. It should be aimed at creating a supportive environment for children brought up by single mothers to help them succeed in their education and personal development. Crucial demands on pedagogical practice are:

- Sensitivity and empathy – sensitising teachers and education staff to the situation of single mothers and showing them empathy and understanding of the difficulties they experience.
- Personalised approach – individualising teaching to suit children's needs and abilities and to take into account possible family challenges.
- Partnership with mothers – creating open channels of communication with single mothers to collaboratively solve problems and monitor children's educational progress.
- Psychological support – providing psychological support and counselling to both children and their mothers to help them cope with emotional difficulties.
- Accessible education – providing access to education outside traditional hours so that single mothers can attend parent meetings and other pre-school events.
- Supporting parenting skills – offering programmes and workshops for single mothers to help them develop parenting skills and understand the needs of their children.
- Equality and elimination of stigma – promoting equality in the kindergarten and eliminating stigma for children from single mothers' families.
- Collaboration with other institutions – organising collaboration with community organisations and government agencies to provide additional support and resources for single mothers.
- Emotional development support – addressing children's emotional development, working to improve their confidence and problem-solving skills.

- Social inclusion – promoting children’s participation in various social and cultural activities to increase their sense of belonging and develop social skills.

Furthermore, social practice towards single mothers should be geared towards creating conditions for their independence and success and improving the quality of life of their families. The provision of social support is an essential part of creating an inclusive society. Postulates for social practice towards single mothers should include:

- Counselling programmes – providing counselling programmes to help mothers develop skills in financial management, family planning and coping with difficult situations.
- Legal aid – providing access to legal aid in cases related to maintenance, parental rights, and other legal and family issues.
- Vocational programmes – offering a wide range of training programmes, apprenticeships, and professional development opportunities so that mothers can obtain jobs or improve their career prospects.
- Childcare – providing access to affordable or free childcare services, such as kindergartens or nurseries, so that mothers can work or develop their vocational skills.
- Assistance in applying for benefits – assisting in completing applications for welfare benefits, family allowances and other forms of financial support.
- Eliminating stigma – providing public education and information campaigns to reduce stereotypes and stigma of single mothers.
- Supporting personal development – offering programmes and classes aimed at developing mothers’ personal and developmental skills, which translates into their self-confidence and decision-making ability.
- Collaborating with institutions – organising cooperation with local government institutions, NGOs and educational institutions to provide comprehensive support to single mothers.

The implementation of these demands requires the cooperation of government, community organisations, and educational and business institutions, as the pursuit of equality and support for single mothers is essential to building a fairer and more sustainable society.

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