



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The characteristics of single-parent families in Greece.

Dionisia F. Antonopoulou

1. Lecturer, Faculty of Management and Economics, Department of Health and Welfare Management, PhD©, Department of Sociology, University of the Aegean

Abstract

Introduction: Breakdown of family life or the family unit consisting of two parents and the building or the formation of more individualized forms of families, such as single-parent families, cohabitation or consensual unions and changes in gender roles and family values, are expressed as forms of family.

Aim: The aim of the present study was to explore characteristics of single-parent families in Greece.

Material-Method: Sample of the study were 206 leaders of single-parent families living in the large urban centres of Athens and Thessaloniki and in the province and have dependent children. Data were collected by the completion of a questionnaire, constricted by the researcher for the needs of the present study. The survey was conducted in the period from January 2010 to May 2010. Statistical analysis was performed with the statistical package SPSS, version 16.00 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL).

Results: 181 single parents (87.7%) were female single parents and only 25 single parents (12.1%) were male. Data analysis showed that their age was over 27, 38.3% were divorced single parents, 21.4% were widowed single parents, 18.9% were separated single parents, 12.6% were unmarried single parents due to abandonment and 8.7% were single parents due to personal choice. The 41.7% of single parents have one child, the 41.3% of single parents have two children, 13.6% have three children, 2.9% have four children and 0.5%

has five children.

Conclusions: The adoption of a specific family policy, in the broader context of a social policy, which will contribute to the normal functioning of the family in relation to the reconciliation of professional and family life, the conducting of researches aiming at the investigation of both specific and broader factors disrupting intrafamily relationships and the specification of the roles within the family, is essential.

Keywords: Forms of family, single-parent family, marital status, characteristics

Corresponding author: Antonopoulou Dionisia, 71 Argirokastrou St., Ilion, 13123, Mobile 6979393019
E-mail: antonopouloudionysia@yahoo.gr

Introduction

Regardless of the definition of the concept of society given by various sociologists, it is certain that the family is the primary, as well as the natural unit of society. The family as an institutionalized group performs various bio-social functions. The functions performed by the family do not concern only the family itself, but the entire community, as their impact and extensions directly affect society itself, according to the occasional forms and types of families.¹⁻³

The German sociologist Dieter Claesseus in his book "Family and value system" clearly shows that the family forces its members towards social adjustment and favours preserving the social system. The need for a stable and integrated home environment is essential, as this environment seals with its impact every new being developed within it. The changes in the way of life as well as technological developments have brought changes in the institution of the family and of its structure in general.¹⁻⁵

The transformations in the social representations of family life, in the relationships between the sexes, but also in parental roles, have brought the prevalence of new forms of



family life.⁶⁻⁸

Since the beginning of the 1980s it has been realized that the variety of family forms and the fluidity that characterizes the organization of private life, create intense problems, concerning both the interpretation of these forms and the prediction of the future of the family and family behaviour,⁹ and therefore the awareness of formulating and implementing a family policy. The family is included in the institutional framework of social policy and the relative activities include various actions concerning the provision of care and education as well as information, ranging from child care to the protection of the elderly, which help people and provide them with the opportunities needed to create social and economic life, but, in addition, help to complete the process of society.¹⁰⁻¹²

Thus with the social changes during the 19th century, we have the “traditional extended family”, during the 20th century we have the “nuclear family” which is considered a result of the transition of society from agriculture to industry during the 19th century, leading to urbanization and the creation of the industrial group, having as a direct consequence the shift from the extended agricultural family to the industrial nuclear family. According to F. Engels, the nuclear family appeared with the concept of private property and the desire to transfer financial assets to specific actual heirs. The nuclear family is considered the prevalent family in this stage of civilization and is considered the modern family. According to Murdock, who studied 200 small communities around the world, through the analysis of the family patterns in these societies, concludes that the nuclear family is the “universal form of social grouping”.¹³

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of single-parent families in Greece with dependent children and to show their

characteristics as a vulnerable social group with specific characteristics.

Material-method

Research of the characteristics of single-parent families in Greece with dependent children was carried out aiming at the practical approach of the topic this study addresses. For the collection of the data a specially designed anonymous questionnaire was used, which among other items contained questions concerning characteristics of single-parent families with dependent children in Greece and were of Greek citizenship and which were given to be completed by a random sample in the large urban centres (Athens-Thessaloniki) and in the province during the first five months of 2010. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions specifically designed to highlight the particular characteristics of single-parent families. The statistical analysis was performed with the statistical package SPSS, VERSION 16.00 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL). All the tests were two-sided. The value $p < 0.05$ was appointed as the level of statistically significant difference. Also the marginal statistically significant differences ($0.05 < p < 0.1$) was recorded.

Results

The survey data showed that 87.9% (181 people) were female single parents and only 12.1% (25 people) were male single parents. The age of single parents that participated in the survey were 44 years old on average, the younger age of the single parents was 27 and the older was 66.

According to the survey data, the marital status of the people surveyed, 79 single parents (38.3%) resulted from divorce and 39 (18.9%) from separation. The 44 single parents (21.4%) resulted from widowhood. The 26 single parents (12.6%) were unmarried due to abandonment and 18 single parents (8.7%) were unmarried due to their own choice.



The majority of the single parent families of the research have one (1) to two (2) children, 41.7% (86 single parents) and 41.3% (85 single parents) respectively.

The 13.6% (28 single parents) have three (3) children, the 2.9% (6 single parents) have four (4) children and the 0.5% (5 single parents) has five (5) children.

The 26.7% (55 single parents) had children under the age of 5, the 62.6% (129 single parents) had children aged 6-18 and the 35% (72 single parents) had children older than 18 years of age, (Table 1).

During the survey, of those who participated, 20% (41 single parents) stated that they were living together and from these the 43.9% (18 single parents) stated that the person they were living with had children of his/her own.

Of those who participated in the survey and were living together at that specific period of time the 33.4% (6 single parents), stated that they had children from combination of family. Regarding the level of education of the single parents who participated in the survey, the 39.3% (81 single parents) stated that they are Senior High School graduates. The 24.3% (50 single parents) stated that they have a tertiary education degree (University/College). The 12.1% (25 single parents) stated that they have finished only High School. The 10.2% (21 single parents) had finished only Primary School. The 9.7% (20 single parents) stated that they are graduates of Vocational Training Institutes V.T.I)

The 2.4% (5 single parents) stated that they were illiterate and had not attended school at all. The 1.9% stated having a Postgraduate Degree (4 single parents). Regarding employment during the period of this survey, the 68.4% (141 single parents) stated that they were employed and the 8.3% (17 single parents) were retired. The rest were unemployed. Also, from the heads of single

parent families who participated in the survey, no one stated that they were receiving independent income, and no head of single parent family stated that there is no need for employment.

Discussion

Studying the demographic data of the sample of our research, it appeared that the phenomenon of single parent families is now existent in Greece. It shows that the majority of single parent families are female and this is justifiable as there is a very strong bond between mother and child.

This bond is derived from the sense of obligation of the mother to protect her fetus, from pregnancy and continues even after the birth of the child, this being the basic role of a mother, resulting in the difficulty of the mother to abandon her child.

The greater percentage of single parents comes from separation/divorce, and has 1 to 2 children. The results of our research agree with the findings of other relevant literature.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ More specifically, with the transnational research IPROSEC¹⁷ concerning the expectations the respondents have from the Greek state, employers and the Non Government Organisations, in relation to the employment of family policies, showed that there is an increase in divorces in Greece.

The study of Kikilia et al.,¹⁸ showed that single parenthood is of female gender, 91% women and 9% men, and the vast majority of single parent have 1 or 2 children (50% and 42% respectively) and that the 82% is working.

The results of our research agree as to the majority of female single parents with a small deviation and show that women comprise 88% and men 12% of single parents. Also our results agree the above mentioned research and showed that the greater percentage of single parent families with children in Greece has 1 or 2 children, (41.7 % (86 people) and 41.3% (85

people) respectively).

Our research differs from this specific research as to the percentage of working single parents and showed lower percentage (68.4%) of working single parents and this is clearly justifiable as the survey was conducted amid an economic crisis, evidence of which is, apart from other things, the lack of jobs.

The study of Mouriki et al.,¹⁹ showed that the subgroup of separated and divorced is about 60% of all single parent families, their average age is 43-45 and the greater percentage (55.2%) of single parent families is of average level of education and working people 75.7%.

The present research agrees as to the majority of the forms of single parenthood and the average age of the single parents, as well as to the majority of the average level of education. It differs from this study as well as to the percentage of working single parent families and showed a lower percentage of working people. Our results are considered justifiable, due to that fact that our research was conducted during a period of economic crisis. A similar study conducted in Cyprus in 2007,²⁰ showed that the greater percentage of single parent families, 84.1%, wanted to have a family again.

The adoption of a specific family policy, in the broader context of a social policy, which will contribute to the normal functioning of the family in relation to the reconciliation of work and family life, the conducting of researches aimed at the investigation of specific, as well as broader factors, concerning the disruption of interfamily relationships and the determination of the roles within the family, is essential.

Conclusions

Literature relating to parenthood of the Greek people note first of all the sharp increase in divorces, assuring however that "family continues to be a paramount value in the life of Greeks".

The subgroups divorced/separated, according to the survey, reflect the upward trend that divorces and domestic conflicts appear to have in Greece. In these new evolving forms of the family, it is imperative that there is further investigation of the family through detailed studies, where the new characteristics are showed, where the roles of its members are demonstrated and the context in which the family evolves is clarified.

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