SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN CYPRUS

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Abstract

This article utilises the findings of the research programme "Single-Parent Families in Cyprus (2004-2006)",[1] which attempted to map the phenomenon of Greek-Cypriot single-parent families, focusing on the social, psychological and financial dimensions. Four aspects in particular are highlighted: a) the major changes that Greek-Cypriot families have undergone in the past few decades, b) the phenomenon of single parenthood in Cyprus diachronically, c) the main differences between single-parent families, and other families in Cyprus (the comparisons draw on a wider survey of families in Cyprus, which the authors carried out in 2004), and d) the Cypriot state and its welfare policies as regards single-parent families.

Keywords: single-parent families, families in Cyprus, support network, family roles and responsibilities, welfare system

Introduction

The tendency towards differentiation of the conventional nuclear family and the creation of new forms of family (such as single-parent families) is characteristic of modern western societies, a phenomenon which looks likely to expand in the years to come. Although the percentage of single-parent families in Cyprus is still relatively small (approximately 5% of all households in 2001) it has been increasing rapidly over the past few years.

This article will utilise the findings of the research programme: "Single-Parent Families in Cyprus (2004-2006)", which attempted to map the phenomenon of Greek-Cypriot single-parent families, focusing on the social, psychological and financial dimensions. Four aspects in particular will be highlighted:

a.   The major changes that the Greek-Cypriot families have undergone in the past few decades,
b.   The phenomenon of single parenthood in Cyprus diachronically,
c.   The main differences between single-parent families, and other families in Cyprus (the comparisons draw on a wider survey of families in Cyprus, which the authors carried out in 2004),

    d.   The Cypriot state and its welfare policies with regard to single-parent families; a comparison will be made with other European countries, so as to situate the Cypriot case within a typology of European welfare systems, highlighting the similarities and differences involved.

Recent Trends of Change in Greek-Cypriot Families

Greek-Cypriot society treasures the institution of the family as the centre of cultural existence and regards it as "a very important 'shelter' for its members, a 'port' that its members can depart from when the time is ripe, but to which they can return when things get rough" (Peristianis et al., 2004). In the past three decades Greek-Cypriot families have undergone radical changes which follow, to a large extent, the relevant global trends while maintaining many of their traditional characteristics.

Family-related behaviour, in Cyprus, has come to display many of the new trends characterising western societies. Some of the major changes are: an increase of the mean age at marriage, an increase in mixed and civic marriages, a higher divorce rate, a low fertility rate, new opportunities given to women, and a greater intimacy between couples as well as in the relations between parents and children. In contrast to trends in the western world, the marriage rate is still increasing, illegitimacy and cohabitation remain at very low levels, and the allocation of responsibilities as regards domestic chores and childrearing still maintains the dominant traditional pattern with women taking most responsibilities.

Statistical data illustrate these changes: In the 1960 Census it was estimated that one woman out of every ten was married before reaching the age of 20, and three out of ten before reaching 25 (Statistical Service, 1963). The mean age at marriage for men was about 26.3 years and for women 23.3 (Demographic Report, 1965). Nowadays, the first marriage is postponed both for men and women. The mean age of men at first marriage increased from 25.7 in the period 1974-1977 to 29.1 in 2005. Similarly, the mean age of women at first marriage increased from 22.9 to 26.7 during the same period (Demographic Report, 2005). Postponed marriage is increasingly preceded by "living-apart-together relations" (couples who have intimate relationships but temporarily live in separate households) or the more traditional cohabitation after engagement, which in fact constitutes a step before marriage. Cohabitation without the prospect of marriage is still a very rare phenomenon because social disapproval remains quite strong. Only a small proportion (3%) of Greek-Cypriots approve of cohabitation of partners with no intention of getting married (Intercollege, 2002, p. 17).

The annual aggregate number of marriages continues to increase. For instance, the total number of marriages of permanent residents in 2005, totalled

5,881, and the crude marriage rate was calculated at 7.8 per thousand population. The number of marriages is still affected by the leap year taboo – that such a year is a bad omen and does not help a marriage to be strong and long-lasting. In the 1960s and 1970s, as in previous years, intermarriage between Christians and other religions was almost non-existent in Cyprus. More than 99% of the Greek Orthodox bridegrooms married Greek Orthodox brides. In addition, more than 90% of marriages and divorces were ecclesiastical, and 95% of all marriages occurring, were among persons who never had married before (Demographic Report, 1965 and 1970). By 2005 ecclesiastical marriages among permanent residents had reduced to 65.8% and civil marriages had increased to 34.2% of the total number of marriages among permanent residents. In most cases of civil marriages the groom was Cypriot and the bride was of foreign nationality (41.4%); in a much smaller (16.2%) number of cases, the bride was Cypriot and the groom was of foreign nationality (Demographic Report, 2005).

The above data illustrates that endogamy is still very high among Greek-Cypriots who choose to be married in church, but is not anymore such a strong criterion among Greek-Cypriots who choose to be married by local mayors (civil marriages). A strong factor accounting for the continuing high numbers of ecclesiastical marriages is family values and traditions: although mate choice is not as strongly influenced by parents as in the past the 'venue choice' is, so parents thereby continue to function 'as transmitters of family traditions' – if only of more attenuated forms of the latter. The majority of civil marriages involve Greek-Cypriot men and Eastern European women (Demographic Report, 2005); a major reason seems to be that civil marriages are more convenient, since the procedure is quicker and cheaper, offering Eastern European women protection from deportation. Besides, getting married to a non-Cypriot already constitutes a break with tradition, so "perpetrators" seem to find it more consistent to opt for a more modern marriage ceremony venue.

Furthermore, the percentage of persons who have never married is decreasing, whereas at the same time there is an increase in second and third marriages. In 2005, for instance, first marriages for both partners constituted 73.2% of total marriages, 18% were remarriages for one partner, and 8.8% were remarriages for both partners (Demographic Report, 2005). This demonstrates that divorce itself does not seem to weaken the Greek-Cypriots' faith in marriage as an institution and that those who are unhappy with their spouses and opt for divorce do so in order to look for a new partner and for a new wedding. For Greek-Cypriots marriage is still an institution of primary significance; in a survey for the Formulation of the Demographic Policy 88% of the participants supported that marriage "… is not an outdated institution", and 81% agreed that people who want children ought to get married (Intercollege, 2002, p. 17).

Postponement of marriage obviously leads to postponement of childbirth and consequently to a low fertility rate. Indeed, the crude birth rate has been falling steadily since the Second World War (Demographic Report, 1970). In 1970 the crude birth rate was computed to be 21.3 per thousand population. By 2005 it had fallen dramatically to 11.1 per thousand population. Socio-economic and cultural factors have been shown to influence this trend: the financial burden of raising children, economic pressures and unemployment, the increasing number of women working outside the home, the desire for a more comfortable life as well as the desire for independence and personal development, fear of the problems in raising children and finally increasing divorce rates have all made their contribution (Intercollege, 2002, p. 16).

Additionally, although there is an increase in pre-marital sexual relations, extra-marital births remain at very low levels. Back in 1965 the Demographic Report suggested that "Illegitimacy has never been a problem in Cyprus and accounts for only 0.1% of all maternities"; this observation seems to continue to be valid today. In 2005, 361 children were born out of wedlock, constituting 4.3%[2] of the total number of births (Demographic Report, 2005). Although considerably higher than the 1965 figure, this percentage is by far lower than respective percentages in European countries (i.e. UK 42.94%, Sweden 55.45% and Germany 29.18%).[3] The constant behind these low figures has been a strong prejudice against illegitimacy, seen to be an indicator of promiscuity – a fact that is not acceptable for Cypriot women, according to the double-standards of local society. Such behaviour is perceived to undermine male power and endanger the institution of the family and the social order itself.

Modern Greek-Cypriot couples seem to have more in common and to have greater intimacy in their relations as compared to traditional couples (Peristianis et al., 2004; Peristianis et al., 2007).[4] Ironically they also seem to have more conflicts and to find these more difficult to resolve. The Demographic Report of 1970 commented that "the divorce rate per thousand of population was 0.21 and it had remained stable since 1963" (Demographic Report, 1970). However, three decades later this situation is no longer true, since the divorce rate has increased substantially and continues to increase further. By 2005, the crude divorce rate had increased to 2.0 per thousand population. In the same year the total divorce rate (which shows the proportion of marriages that are expected to end in divorce), rose to 233 per thousand marriages, from 42 per thousand in 1980 (Demographic Report, 2005). In the past the divorce rate was retained at a low rate by social, religious and legal restrictions. Like elsewhere in Europe (Popenoe, 1993) a growing number of couples seem to be experiencing divorce nowadays because of changes in the family's traditional economic bonds, the higher expectations for marriages, the reduced influence of religion, and the reduction of the social costs for dissolving a marriage.[5]

Additionally, the vast majority of Greek-Cypriot women confront the problem of having to balance the employment and family responsibilities. The tendency of increased equality in the allocation of the household chores and childrearing, witnessed in other western countries, seems to hold true only in theory in Cyprus. More than 90% of Greek-Cypriot women carry the main responsibility for both household chores and childcare, independent of whether they work or not (Peristianis et al., 2004, pp. 93-97). Greek-Cypriot husbands, following their traditional roles, dedicate themselves almost exclusively to paid employment and act as mere 'assistants' to their wives in the house, not taking any initiative in the completion of chores relating to the house or in the practical care of children of pre-school age.

Nevertheless, both partner and parent-child relations are characterised by several changes in the values that prevail, in the balance of power and decision making, and in the emotional content they may have. While there are still strong inequalities in the allocation of domestic labour, the traditional values concerning the strict hierarchy of gender roles (i.e. the relationship of power-obedience of the mother towards the father) are rejected by the majority of the Greek-Cypriots. Furthermore, despite the fact that fathers still hold the leading position in Cypriot families, the power 'o pateras' used to possess as 'chief' of the family, is much weaker today (Peristianis et al., 2004, pp. 134-138).

In the traditional-patriarchal society the dominant marriage relationship was based on male authority. Weddings were based on pragmatic considerations and focused on such issues as the survival, reputation and consolidation of a family's position in society – and thus the personal happiness of the couple played a secondary role. The inequality between men and women extended throughout every aspect of their social and private lives. Significant changes have, however, occurred in the relationships that have emerged in modern Greek-Cypriot families. Marriages today are less determined by community pressures and values, and there is an emphasis on better interpersonal relations, that are characterised by mutual affection. Marriage is a more flexible institution, which can be used as the royal road towards self-fulfilment. 'Companionship' is a new concept that is seen to characterise modern marriages based on democratic decision-making by the pair.

In the traditional families not only women but children also lacked rights: "Children weren't reared for their own sake but for the satisfaction of the parents" (Giddens, 2002, p. 55). Parents did love their children but they cared more for their contribution to agricultural and household chores, because their constant struggle was the economic survival of the family. A first major push towards a transformation of parent-children relationships came with mass education during the British colonial period: this meant the withdrawal of children from the labour force and gave

rise to a new conception of children and childhood – more akin to an 'investment for the future' – rather than as contributors to immediate production needs. Indeed a good education, which for most extends to university level, is considered a must for young Greek-Cypriots and has become a substitute for the traditional dowry institution for those who are poor or a complement to it for the rich. Parent-child relations have equally undergone changes based on children's needs and sensitivities. Parental authoritative supervision has gradually been transformed into parental guidance, and the blind obedience of children towards their parents to self-development. Contemporary Greek-Cypriot families tend to be overprotective towards their younger members. An illustration of this is the high percentage of young people (54%) between the ages of 18 and 29 years who reside with their parents in the family home until their engagement or marriage[6] (Peristianis et al., 2007). This may be explained by a number of reasons, such as extended studies, higher affluence which reduces any pressing need for children to work, increasing moral tolerance in the parental home and the high costs of renting and living away from parents, which all contribute to lowering any pressure to leave (for similar developments in Europe, see Galland, 1997 cited by Cliquet, 2003, p. 2).

Children are dissuaded from hard work inside or outside of the house and are encouraged to focus on their self-development. A good education has been transformed into one of the most basic values of the contemporary Greek-Cypriot family. Thus homework is now an important daily family issue, and agonising over grades as well as arguments between parents and children regarding their grades are usual phenomena in Greek-Cypriot households. Greek-Cypriot parents invest much energy and an enormous amount of money in educating their children. "Yet knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not the primary concern" (Markides et al., 1978, p. 150); competition for status seems to be the primary incentive not only for young Cypriots but also for their parents. Parents know that to a great extent their success and social status centres on their children's ability to complete their studies and secure a 'good' job. It is still not uncommon for parents to press their children to follow a particular programme of study, which the children may not want, in order to actualise their own unfulfilled adolescent dreams.

The Phenomenon of Single Parenthood in Cyprus

Single Parenthood in the Past

In the past single parenthood was almost exclusively related to widowhood. **Divorces** were almost non-existent since the practice was strongly forbidden by the strict moral codes of traditional Greek-Cypriot society. However, due to the low social position of women in bygone days, divorced women, and not men, were the ones to be stigmatised and marginalised. In the few cases where a couple "dared" to divorce, the woman was blamed as proof that she was unable to keep her husband and maintain the coherence of the family unit.

The underprivileged position of women, in Cypriot society, is illustrated in the data from the first Census conducted by the British ("Report on the Census of Cyprus, 1881"). As seen in Table 1 the percentage of divorced women (4.9%) was almost fourfold as compared to that of men (1.3%). This is one of the indications that emphasises that following divorce, men are able to continue with a second marriage easier than women. Divorce not only stigmatised parents but also the children of the family, who were regarded as persons of an inferior quality: they brought shame to the community, as they constituted a reminder of their parents' deviant behaviour, which undermined the ideal type of family.

**Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Men and Women
of Marriage Age, (15+) in 1881[7]**

GENDER	MARRIED	WIDOWED	DIVORCED	TOTAL
Men	34,275 (59.4%)	2,822 (4.9%)	78 (1.3%)	**37,175**
Women	34,050 (60.1%)	9,241 (16.3%)	276 (4.9%)	**43,567**
Total	**68,325**	**12,063**	**354**	**80,742**

Widowhood was faced with less harshness than divorce because it was considered to be the result of destiny, and not a conscious and deviant decision. Women, who lost their husbands, usually suffered from deprivation and were in a desperate position as a consequence of their family income decreasing dramatically, to the extent that they were unable to cover the basic needs of their family. The 'welfare system' existing in the early twentieth century was in its embryonic stage and thus support from the Cypriot state was non-existent and all social groups suffered associated risks. The family income was, therefore, based on a single-parent's labour, if they were able to work, or more generally they relied on the support offered by members of their extended family.

The remarriage of a widow depended on the social facts of a specific historical period but especially on the demographic situation on the island. Loizos (1975) has suggested that prior to 1930, women as wives were more scarce than men in the marriage market, and that it was, therefore, possible for widows to remarry; [this became much more difficult after World War II, when men became more scarce]. Despite this, re-marrying did not seem to be as easy for women as it was for men, and many women, therefore, had to remain as single parents and carry the associated stigma for their whole lives. Widows had to dress in black until their death as this was considered proof of respect towards the dead husband and

served as a means of constant remembrance. As shown in Table 1 the percentage of widows was threefold (16.3%) to that of widowers (4.9%) – perhaps an indicator of the difficulties of re-marriage for women.

The basic reasons for the comparatively smaller number of re-marriages of widows were: 1) the relative shortage of men, as compared to women; 2) the traditional behaviour codes by which women abided, meant that they were unable to take the initiative to search for a new husband but had to be patient until a man sought their hand in marriage; 3) the belief that a man who was not the biological father of a girl was a threat to her chastity; 4) the traditional sexual codes whereby men were expected to marry virgin women, and to avoid 'second-hand' choices, which were judged of a lower value, and 5) men's unwillingness to undertake the responsibilities involved in the care of children that were not their biological offspring. In contrast, widowers were supported by the community and usually married within a short time after their wife's death. This derived from the traditional roles, which determined that childcare and household chores were the responsibility of women, and men therefore needed a woman in the house to take care of their children and the housework.

Unmarried mothers were an even rarer phenomenon – though when it occurred both the mother and the child(ren) were stigmatised for their whole lives, in many cases being rejected by the very members of the woman's family. Even women who were abandoned by their fiancés or husbands during pregnancy, or women who already had children and had been abandoned, were marginalised by the rest of the community. The label "unmarried mother" was like a curse which a woman carried with her to the grave, her body having born the fruit of "a forbidden pleasure" (Josiane and Riga, 1997), and her actions having disrupted the sacred codes of "honour and shame". The husband and father, in traditional society, formed the anchor of his wife and children's identities, hence, unmarried mothers and their children were deemed to be people without bearings, and children were referred to as "the bastards of x" (name of the woman).

Single Parenthood Today

Educational opportunities for young people, and especially for women, increased after the Second World War and particularly after Cyprus' independence as a result of economic development. Such socioeconomic changes brought about an improvement in the status of women and younger people, and somewhat loosened the dependence of children on parents, and of wives on their husbands. Accordingly, this "emancipation" led to a general restructuring of the power relations within marriage and the family.

The Turkish invasion of 1974 gave rise to even more drastic economic and social changes. One of the negative social consequences was the increase in the

numbers of single parents,[8] mainly because of the many dead and missing Greek-Cypriots, especially males. A decade after the Turkish invasion (1984) the number of single-parent families with children under 18 years old constituted 5% of the total number of families. The major causes for the increase in lone parenthood were the death of one spouse, missing fathers, divorce, abandonment, and unmarried mothers.

The displacement of one-third of Greek-Cypriots in 1974, and the economic crisis which followed, gave new impetus to the numbers of women entering the labour market, augmenting similar trends which began to appear during the 1960-1974 period. Many of these women provided the cheap labour required to combat the growth in light industries (mostly in the manufacturing of footwear and clothing). The demand for specialised knowledge and skills, especially in the service sector in which women became prominent, meant that a new boost was given to the education of girls. The number of rapes of Greek-Cypriot women during the invasion (European Commission of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, 1976) and the resulting unwanted pregnancies led to a relaxation of the Abortion Law (Vassiliadou, 2002) – an initial small window was to gradually become a wide open door, to the extent that Cyprus is, by default, one of the most liberal countries in the world on the abortions issue.[9] These developments led to a greater degree of freedom and the independence of women; global developments have also contributed to the weakening of traditional institutions and the further equality of gender. All these changes have set in motion different dynamics that influence individual lives and create new priorities and expectations.

An increasing number of single-parent families is one such change in family structures and dynamics that the twentieth century has witnessed in Western Europe and North America. Although in Cyprus the percentage is small (approximately 5% of all households) it has been increasing rapidly in recent years. This increase is mainly due to an increase in the number of divorces. According to the Census of Population, 2001, the last few decades show a decrease in the number of members per household whereas at the same time there has been an increase in one-person households and in single-parent families.

The majority of both Greek-Cypriot men and women are married (92.7% of women and 96.9% of men), 5.2% of women and 2.7% of men are divorced, 2.1% are widows and 0.4% are widowers.
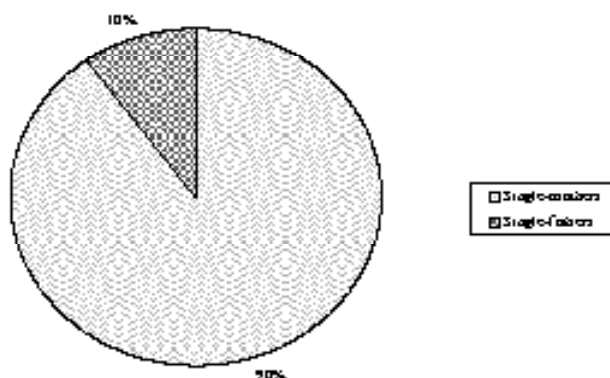
Graph 1

Family status of the population between the ages 15-59, by gender, 2001
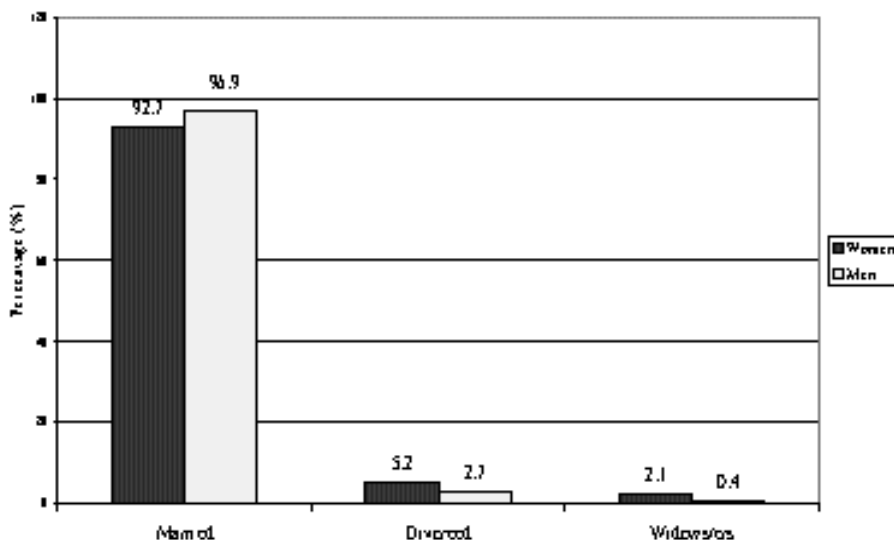
In 2001, the number of Greek-Cypriot single-parents in Cyprus, (between the ages of 15-59) was 9,784: out of these 8,846 (90.4%) were single mothers and 938 (9.6%) were single fathers.
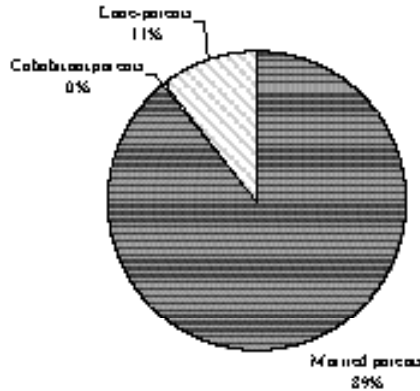
Graph 2

Single-parents in Cyprus between the ages 15-59, by gender, 2001

In the total number of households with couples between 15-59 years of age, who live with their children, lone-parents total 10.6%, and married parents total 89%, whereas cohabitant parents are almost inexistent (0.3%).

Graph 3

Households with couples (15-59 years old) and their resident children, 2001

From the total number of children/young adults (0-24 years old) residing with their parents 6.4% live with one parent, 93.3% live with both their married parents and 0.3% live with their unmarried parents. As regards the total number of the population of children/young adults, 0-24 years of age, 83.3% live with their married parents, 5.7% live with one parent, 0.3% live with their unmarried parents and 10.2% live alone, or are married, or live in different specialised institutions (such as those catering for disabled children).

Graph 4

Children living with their parents between the ages 0-24 years old, 2001

Children living with their married parents
Children living with one parent
Children living with their unmarried parents
Children not living with their parents
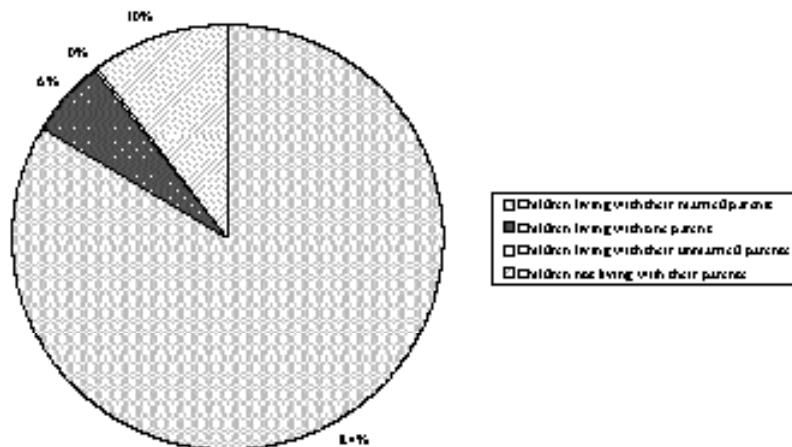
Responsibilities in the Greek-Cypriot Single-parent Family and Support Network
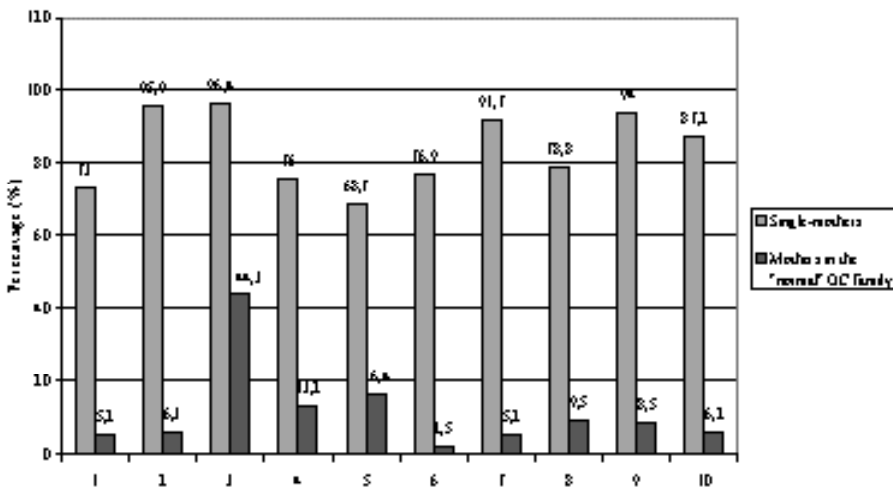
Responsibilities Undertaken in Single-parents' Families in Comparison to "Average" Greek-Cypriot family

One of the most important findings of the research is that single parents – the vast majority of whom are women – are solely and entirely responsible for children (care, emotional support and discipline), as well as housework (cleaning, cooking and washing) and, at the same time they are almost exclusively responsible for the family budget. Seventy-three per cent of the participants said that they managed the family budget because they were the main breadwinners. It is important to note, however, that 22.4% received financial support from elsewhere – 7% identified the extended family as their main source of financial support, with the State taking responsibility for the full support of 12% and the secondary support of a further 5.4%. In addition, there are a few cases (2.3%) where the other parent assumes the main role in the financial support of the single-parent family through alimony payments – indicating that the financial burden is borne by the parent (almost always the women) responsible for the children.

A comparison made between the present research and a study of the "normal" Greek-Cypriot (GC) family (2004),[10] indicates that single parents carry most of the burdens alone, so that parenting and other responsibilities seem overwhelming, crushing the individual.

Graph 5

Main responsibilities undertaken by single-mothers and mothers in the "normal" GC family
(Comparison between two surveys)

1.	Main financial contribution
2.	Deciding on large expenses
3.	Deciding on day-to-day expenses
4.	Taking children to private lessons/extra curriculum activities
5.	Helping with children's homework
6.	Deciding whether children will go out at night
7.	Teaching good manners to children
8.	Setting punishments for children
9.	Supporting children when in difficulties
10.	Giving pocket money to children

In single-parent families those decisions concerning family expenses (e.g. large and day-to-day expenses, children's pocket money) together with efforts to teach and support children are, in the main, (90% and above) the responsibility of the single-mother. By contrast, in the 'average' Greek-Cypriot family the largest group of mothers (84% and above) share such responsibilities with their husbands. There is only one exception, relating to "day-to-day-expenses", in which 44.3% of the mothers reported that they shouldered this responsibility.
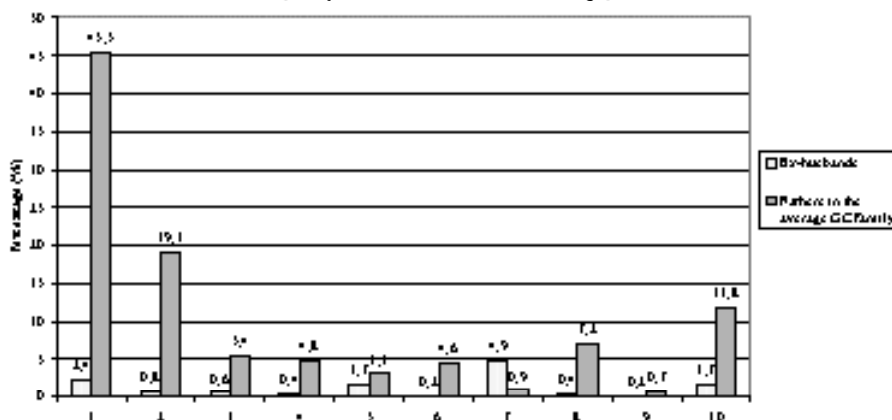
If we now compare the main responsibilities undertaken by single-mothers and single-fathers we can see that the rates for both are about the same for all tasks, except for financial issues and homework support. The relevant figures demonstrate that for each parent single parenthood necessitates an increase in tasks relating to childcare and household chores, and the pressure they feel when actively coping with their new family situation is about the same. Single parenthood is demanding on mothers and fathers and often leads to feelings of sadness, loneliness and inadequacy; this corroborates the outcomes from various investigations (i.e. Stewart et al., 1997) which suggest that both men and women experience common anxieties when they become single parents. This new state of affairs is usually more difficult for Greek-Cypriot single fathers who, in a two-parent family, are mainly responsible for the family budget whereas concerning other tasks, i.e. practical childcare, child rearing and household chores, they have secondary or no responsibility. Consequently, single parenthood brings all together new responsibilities.

A comparison between the main responsibilities undertaken by ex-husbands, based on what single mothers and fathers in mainstream Greek-Cypriot families reported (Graph 6), and based on what the husbands or their wives said, shows that the contribution of ex-husbands to almost all family responsibilities is practically zero, except for two issues. More specifically, in single-parent families, 2.4% of ex-

husbands provide the main "financial contribution" and 4.9% dispensed the main additional responsibility for "teaching good manners to children". At the same time it is noteworthy to mention that fathers in mainstream families do not render much higher participation than 'ex-husbands' in single-parent families when it comes to issues concerning practical childcare and the upbringing of children. The overall financial contribution is the only difference between 'fathers' and 'ex-husbands', and this relates to the fact that Greek-Cypriot fathers, in line with their traditional roles, are the main financial providers. Thus, 45.5% of fathers in mainstream Greek-Cypriot families shoulder the "main responsibility for the family budget"; against only 2.4% of ex-husbands; also against only 0.8% of ex-husbands in single-parent families, 19.1% of the former "decide on large expenses" and 11.8% "give pocket money to children" as against 1.7% of the latter.

Graph 6

Main responsibilities undertaken by ex-husbands and fathers in mainstream G-C families
(Comparison between the two surveys)

|	1. Main financial contribution
	2. Deciding on large expenses
	3. Deciding on day-to-day expenses
	4. Taking children to private lessons/extra curriculum activities
	5. Helping with children's homework
	6. Deciding whether children will go out at night
	7. Teaching good manners to children
	8. Setting punishments for children
	9. Supporting children when in difficulties
	10. Giving pocket money to children

Support Network

Single-parents seem to perform most of the chores by themselves but a significant proportion report receiving unpaid help from other sources, especially from their parents, brothers and sisters. As was verified by the survey for single parents, their own parents are their primary source of emotional, material and practical support. The reliance on their own parents is even more apparent in times of family crisis, and as the latter seem to maintain a deep sense of obligation both to their children and grandchildren they are usually more than willing to give everything they can. This highlights the importance of kinship as the foundation of the social support network in Cypriot society. The parents of the single-parent are a bedrock ensuring both safety and stability to a large number of single parents and their children. As Thompson (1999) suggests in a similar context, grandparents seem to "provide crucial help at all levels", acting "as practical everyday carers, as emotional anchors, firm but gentle childrearers, as models for achievement, as listeners and as transmitters of crucial information". Grandparents, seem to be ready to make sacrifices with little prospect of seeing any "return" on their investment – save for the respect and love of their children and grandchildren, and surely the pleasure of executing their expected duty.

Analytically, grandmothers and grandfathers presented the highest percentages in all types of supportive roles to single-parent families: "financial" (53%), "help with childcare" (45.4%), "emotional/psychological" (36.2%), "give advice" (35.5%), "help with household chores" (25%), "house repairs" (18.9%) and "hospitality/provide them with a home" (15.9%). Brothers and sisters of single parents also provide "emotional/psychological" support to 16.3% of them, "give advice" (12.1%), "house repairs" (8.8%) and "financial help" (8.1%).
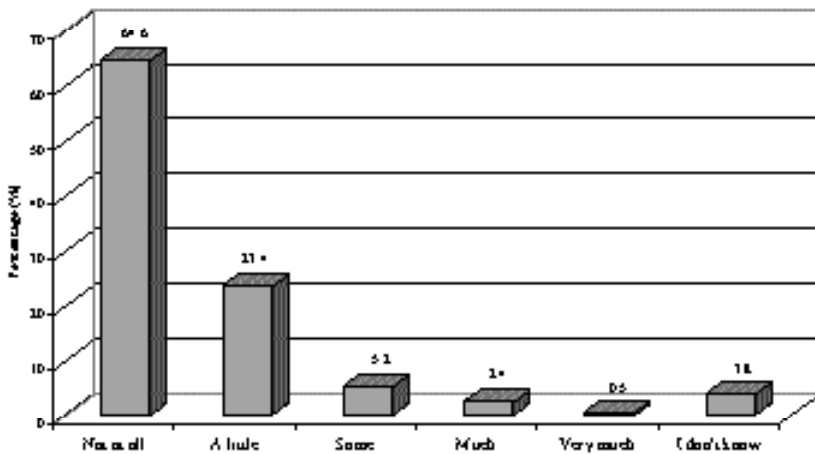
Graph 7

Support network – Main role

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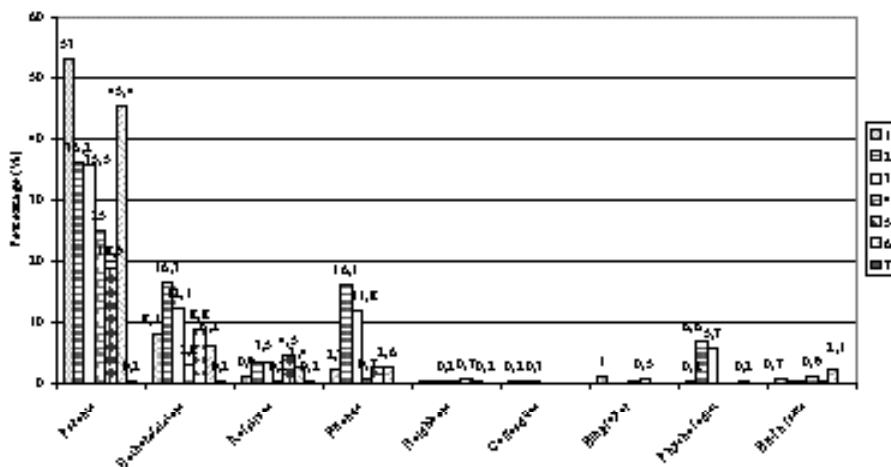
Welfare System in Cyprus

There are no special policies in Cyprus for single-parents except for certain provisions in the Law for "Public Assistance" (Cyprus Government Gazette, N.95(I) 2006). The general dissatisfaction of single parents with governmental social policy is demonstrated in Graph 8 which shows that 64.6% are totally disappointed with relevant current policies, 28.6% are satisfied to a "little" or "some" degree, and only a negligible percentage (2.9%) are satisfied to a "much" or "very much" degree.
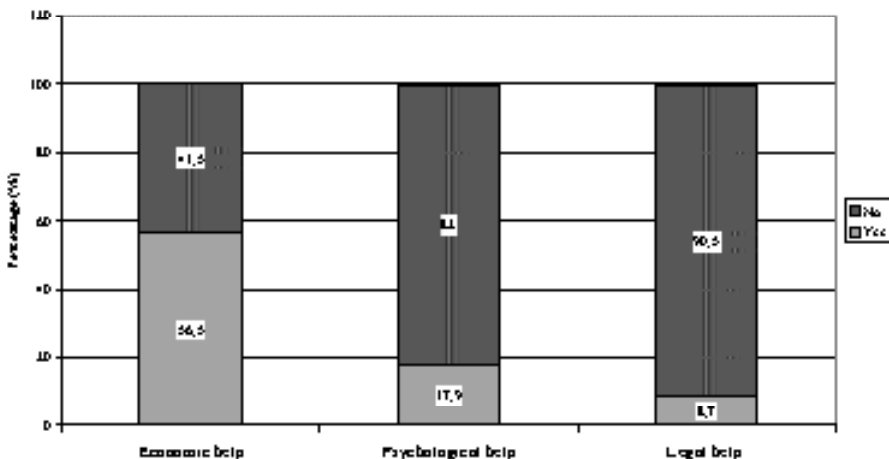
Graph 8

Satisfaction for social policies concerning single-parent families

Graph 9
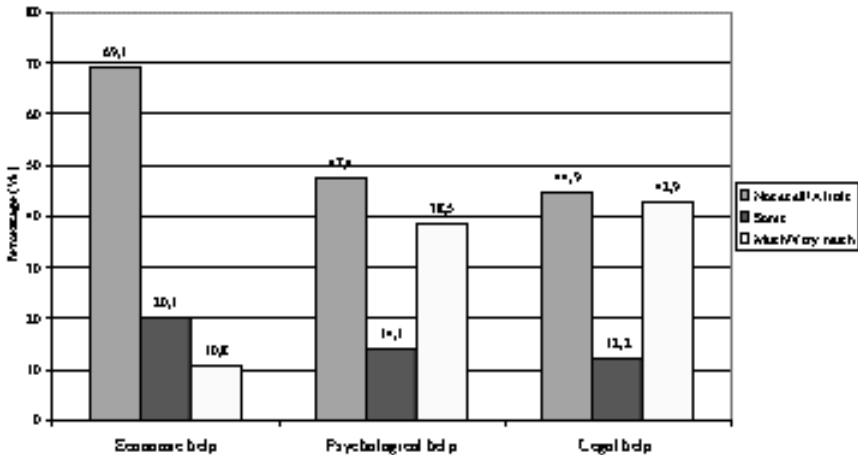
Did you apply for governmental help?

Graph 10

If you did so, how helpful it was?

To the question (Graph 9) of whether single parents applied to the relevant services of the state for various types of support, more than half (56.5%) responded to the effect that they had asked for financial help, approximately one-fifth (17.9%) had asked for psychological help and one-tenth (8.7%) had requested legal support. From those who did request help (Graph 10), the majority were disappointed with the service they received. Their biggest disappointment was the financial aid they received. Almost 7 out of 10 single parents are totally dissatisfied, or satisfied only to a "little" degree, 2 out of 10 seem to be dissatisfied to "some" degree, and less than 1 out of 10 declare that they are "much" or "very much" satisfied. Participants seemed to be happier with the psychological and legal support they received. Once again, even though, the majority gave a negative reply (47.4% were "a little" or "totally" dissatisfied with the psychological aid they received, and 44.9% were "a little" or "totally" dissatisfied with the legal aid), a substantial number of them said that they were "somewhat", "much", or "very much" satisfied.

The research results confirm theories which highlight the weakness in the welfare systems of Mediterranean countries, in responding successfully to the needs of their citizens.

It is worth considering Esping-Andersen's typology (1990) of European welfare systems. The theory underpinning the typology focuses on the relations between the various actors playing the role of "social insurer". There are three institutions which deal with social risks: a) the family utilising the principle of reciprocity, b) the market which fosters distribution based on monetary exchanges, and, c) the public

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sector which undertakes redistribution. The relative importance of each of these three actors of social protection varies in the different welfare systems, giving rise to three distinct systems: first the liberal system, based on the laws of the free market and on low state intervention (linked with Anglo-Saxon countries); second, the social-democratic system, based on universalism and egalitarianism, found mostly in Scandinavian states; and the conservative-corporatism system found in continental and Mediterranean Europe, in which there is little state provision and considerable reliance on corporate groups.

Critics of Esping-Andersen's theory suggest that the typology tends to lump together countries whose social welfare systems are quite different. For instance, the countries of continental Europe (i.e. France and Germany), have far more comprehensive welfare schemes than the countries of south Europe such as Greece, Italy and Spain. Trifiletti (1999) proposes that the welfare system of the Mediterranean states is "lacking" and that their family policy is often tacit and weak. Mediterranean systems seem to assume that social risks for the individual should be partially or fully covered by the immediate family, or even the extended family (Trifiletti, 1999). In the same vein, Moreno suggests that family support in south Europe substitutes for the weak welfare state; intra-familial transfers being both material and immaterial (Moreno, 1997). Consequently, family-centrism goes hand in hand with the passive or undeveloped family policy in Mediterranean countries.

Cyprus seems to be a good example of the Mediterranean model. In our analysis we have pointed out the following "vicious circle":

1. Since the family is strong and cohesive	then →	it is not necessary for the state to support its citizens
2. Since the state is not supportive of its citizens	then →	the family has to remain strong and cohesive

Greek-Cypriots do not seem to expect too much from the state precisely because they expect almost everything from their families. When their own marriage or family is not functioning properly, as in the case of single parents, they often turn to their parental families for support. And even when they do resort to the state, it is only, or mostly, for financial aid as they perceive the state as a substitute for the 'father-provider'. As regards psychological, emotional or other types of social support, they still turn to their immediate kin and not to the more impersonal services of the state. Greek-Cypriots do not press the state hard enough for it to develop the required policies for maintaining a system which may provide good quality services to individuals at risk. This is not to say that Greek-Cypriots do not hope for some kind of state assistance but they do not take it to be "self-evident" as it is in other more advanced European countries. In this way the system seems to perpetuate itself.

Notes

1. The research programme "Single-Parent Families in Cyprus" focused on Greek-Cypriot single-parent families, and especially the social, psychological and financial aspects. Findings have been compared with those of other European societies in order to identify similarities and differences. A study of the current social policies in these societies enabled a number of proposals to be put forward as to how relevant social policies can be improved in Cyprus, drawing on the experience of the social welfare systems of other European countries.

    The research was conducted by distributing 600 confidential questionnaires to single-parent families in both rural and urban areas of the Republic of Cyprus. Another 50 in-depth interviews were also carried out using semi-structured questionnaires, as well as two focus groups which aimed to investigate acutely the problems these families face. Officials from the Social Welfare Service, members of Parliament, a judge from the Family Court and the presidents of various NGOs were also interviewed in an attempt to ascertain the 'official views' on the phenomenon.

    The research was conducted by the University of Nicosia/Intercollege in collaboration with different governmental and non-governmental organisations (the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, the Cyprus Sociological Association, the Parliamentary Committee of Labour and Social Insurance, the Social Welfare Services and the Pancyprian Association of Single-Parent Families and Friends), and was funded by the Research Promotion Foundation.

2. Most similar percentage: Greece: 5.10%, Croatia: 10.51%, Liechtenstein: 18.90%, Poland: 18.45%, Slovakia: 18.45%, Spain: 26.57%, Ireland: 31.99%, Netherlands: 34.89%, United Kingdom: 42.94%, Sweden: 55.45%, Estonia: 58.51%, and Iceland: 65.72% (Eurostat, 2005).

3. This percentage includes newborns born from Greek-Cypriot but also foreign mothers.

4. Based on the results of the "Study for Leisure Time, Employment, Relationships, Perceptions and Problems of the Cypriot Youth" the two most important pre-requisites for a successful marriage, for the Greek-Cypriot young people between the ages of 15-29 years are:
    1. "Mutual respect and understanding" (91.7%)
    2. "A good sexual relationship" (86.1%)

5. The rural pattern of most women contributing usually as unwaged domestic labour on family farms and some women working as day labourers has changed to a pattern whereby many married women, and most single women, continue to seek waged employment in the formal and informal labour market.

6. In particular, the percentage of young people living with their parents between the ages of 18 and 21 years is 84.4%, in the age group 22-25 years it is 62.6% and in the age group 26-29 years old it is 25.5%.

7. The data include the total population of Cyprus during this period. There is no separation between Orthodox, Muslims and other minorities.

8. There were approximately, 3,000 Greek Cypriots dead and 1,500 missing, as a result of the invasion.

9. The most recent data for unwanted pregnancies and abortions can be found in the survey "Health in the Relationships between the two Genders and Sexuality" (Chrysanthou, 2006) carried out by the Cyprus Youth Organisation and the Institute of Reproductive Medicine of Cyprus. In particular, 9.5% of the girls between the ages of 13-18 years old admitted that some of them had faced the problem of unwanted pregnancy and abortion either in the past or the present, and some others confessed to having given birth to a child.

10. This research was entitled: "The State of the Contemporary Greek-Cypriot Family". The aim of the research was to map aspects of the life and values of contemporary Greek-Cypriot families.The research was conducted by distributing 1,100 confidential questionnaires to persons between the ages of 15-64 years in both rural and urban areas of the Republic of Cyprus. Another 50 in-depth interviews were also carried out using semi-structured questionnaires, as well as the three focus groups all aiming to investigate in more detail the opinions, values and attitudes of parents and children. The research was conducted by the Research Centre of Intercollege (2002-2004), and was funded by the National Committee on the Family.

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