

# The difficulties single fathers face



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Once a famous German caricaturist and poet Wilhelm Busch (1832 - 1908) said that " becoming a father isn't difficult, but it's very difficult to become a father." This phrase can be interpreted in different ways, but at the moment it is as topical as never before, since essential social changes and shifts state the question of parenthood for men in absolutely new light. The matter is, more and more men these days find themselves single fathers, and have to face new reality, while the society is not actually ready to accept them appropriately. This problem is attracting more and more attention of public and specialists, but still there is not enough research of the matter and fathers still essentially take pains to prove their rights: " single dads remain a poorly represented group in official statistics, government programmes and communities," as Sandra Gruescu (2010, p. 19) states. The topicality of the subject and its narrow presentation in scholar studies has motivated us to focus attention on this problem in order to find out whether single fathers really face many problems in child fostering and their personal life and what ways out there are for them to make things better. In this way the object of our research is lone parenthood and single fatherhood of London is the main subject. To move from the first to the latter we are going to use deductive method. Apart from that, as for methodology to be applied, we shall use surveying and case study in order to get information at first hand, content-analyses in order to understand what has already been found out and what the probable holes of studies are. To provide that, we shall study local, national and partly international press, official reports and local overviews. Then we shall be able to sum up theoretical and empirical data and make conclusions on what are the modern conditions for men growing children on their own.

In this way, tasks we are going to undertake are the following: to study general materials on single parenthood; single out the issue of lone fathers, especially those living in London; synthesize fragments gathered and give critical summary; involve the comments of interviewees; and finally to tally up the situation.

### SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN TERMS AND FIGURES

In this paragraph we are to find out what is single parenthood, where it takes its roots and where results in. On the whole, as for the terms, a lone parent is one who takes care of a child (or children) all on his or her own, without participation of another parent within home. Divorce or death of the spouse are among the main reasons of growing a child alone; adoption, abuse or abandonment, and artificial insemination. A parent who takes a conscious decision to grow up a child on his own from the very beginning is also called a choice parent.

All in all, as calculated in 2009, there are 1.9 million sole parents in the UK. In total they bring up about three million children. By Labour Market Review (2006), cited by Charlotte Philby (2010), each fourth family is a family of one parent (among them about 8-11 % are male). Among those, 13% are under 25 years of age.

Those parents who stay with the child most of the time are called 'primary carers', and those who just visit children are called 'secondary carers'. By statistics, more than 90 percent of primary carers in the United Kingdom are women, and it goes without saying that all the assistance from the government, tax credits and benefits are given to them. Still, as the General

National Survey has shown, more than a half of single-parented households live below the poverty line. On average, it takes about 600 pounds per year to raise a child, and about 10, 500 pounds to grow a child from birth till full age.

#### CALAMITIES TO OVERCOME

Except financial, there is a great number of long-term social and psychological, physical and mental health influences on both ex-spouses and children after divorce. It may be destructive or loyal, and the strength of loss depends on the extent of intimacy between children and each of the parents, on parents' characteristics like age, education level, occupation and income, on relations left between parents, on visitation rights prescribed for the secondary carer, and the circumstances children grow in on the whole (Coombs, 1991). ' Half-abandoned' children are more like to experience behavioural problems, and Augustine Kposawa (2003) adds a schedule of main consequences: higher risks of clinical depression, greater need for formal psychiatric assistance, and higher rates of suicide among men.

As any other vulnerable group, sole parents receive a kind of support from the government, from non-profit organizations and on-line resources as well. These days there are more and more forums, web-sites, social networks, blogs and professional advice services where sole parents can share their problems and look for decisions together. A good example is the Gingerbread National Charity for Single Parents.

The development of such programs seems to be obvious for the first sight, but in reality the issue is not so well-defined. The matter is, there is much

debate over single parenthood: on the one hand, government assistance is a normal social practice. But on the other hand, it turns out that the government itself is supporting the phenomenon which is against the society itself while sole parenthood doesn't correspond to the traditional moral values and family standards; and it seems, there can be no sound society with unsound families. Thus present British Prime Minister Mr. Cameron is rather to encourage marriages by £150 tax breaks than take care of objectionable sole parents living under the breadline (Rowling, 2010). The police of the Tories has naturally risen a good deal of criticism: " Do you not think that is discrimination against someone who pays their tax bill every month, and someone who is going to find that my friend down the road who has managed to find Mr Right gets away with paying less tax than I do, just because I am raising my children by myself?" (Tapsfield, 2009 p. 15). Single parents are pushed to feel second-class.

But why are we now there?

Through the 20th century the amount of households with single parent was rather low, but during last three decades figures began to grow rapidly. Basically, these changes have their historical, social and demographic reasons. Firstly, women began to feel more confident in their rights and freedoms, and more and more of them came to the conclusion that living on their own has more advantages than living in an unhappy wedlock. They began to receive more support from the official structures and the attitude of the society became not as reprehensible as it used to be. " Fresh figures show that 57 per cent choose the single life as they say it is more rewarding", Steve Doughty (2010, p. 30) writes. Meanwhile the civilized

world has been experiencing crucial shifts in gender social roles. More and more women prefer career to family and under the tension of business life more and more women are losing their maternal instinct while paternal one on the contrary has been gaining force.

## FATHERS IN THE MIDDLE

Now we are to sharpen our attention at a narrower group presented by sole fathers. It was investigated that “ more than 3 million men are classed as ‘ economically inactive’, living on benefits or the black economy” (Arendell, 1995 p. 112). It is also an example of social changes, but still many of men either successful or not very face obligation and will to be primary carers for their children: “ Active involvement in the day-to-day lives of children is no longer the exclusive domain of mothers. Fathers are being encouraged to build closer interpersonal relationships with their children. As a result, many fathers have found that being a parent is richly rewarding and they are not willing to assume the role of “ weekend” father just because a marriage relationship has soured” (Bartz and Witcher, 1978 p. 2). According to the statistics, family heads are divorced or separated fathers (8. 4 per cent), never-married fathers (1. 5 per cent), and widowers (0. 9 per cent).

In the United Kingdom there are 210, 000 male sole parents (8-11 %) rising up 280, 000 dependent children. In London specifically, by National Statistics (2006), there are 16, 473 households headed by single males. In other words, each ninth single parent is father. Meanwhile there are 180, 366 male secondary cares also identified as ‘ absent fathers’. In the borough alone

there are 5, 710 households headed by single parents with 934 children living with their fathers (Ehrlich, 2008).

### SPECIFIC DIFFICULTIES FACED BY SINGLE FATHERS

It goes without saying that lone fathers face generally the same problems as lone mothers, but there are some particular troubles too. First and foremost, it is already difficult to prove their right on the child, as courts traditionally favour mothers. And even if men win, their exes often don't leave them in peace, as they are more natural to be with a kid. The society has much less trust and approval for men. Nevertheless, "men can be essential for developing language skills, developing awareness of rules and boundaries and being a positive male role model in the child's life" (Risman, 1986 p. 96).

Further on, it is considered that financial problems are less spread among men, but in fact they receive much less flexibility at their workplace and face negative attitude of supervisory. They are taken as awkward while it is not commonly for fathers to be so involved and faithful. Meanwhile is the most important thing for a child, his or her love can't be bought with money, therefore a lone father has to balance between financial obligations and emotional relations. "If they go straight back to work, they're treated like bad parents; if they don't, they're called benefit scroungers," Jane Ahrends explains (Philby, 2010 p. 15).

Moreover, it is not a secret for a father that a child needs a woman to see a female behavioural model and to provide care, but it is rather hard for a lone father to get married again: a woman is likely to avoid a man with children, as their mother is often there too; maybe, the girl doesn't like children at all

or wants to have her own first and better to share all those first experiences with her husband; she doesn't want to be initially judged as a mother and she doesn't want to share her husband's attention with someone else (Miller, 2007). Yet, for sole fathers on the first place are the problems with their exes with whom, for the sake of their children, they should co-work effectively despite all misunderstanding.

Then, what is even more striking, sole fathers should be ready to cope with emotional distress of children who can have low self-esteem, feel different from others and consequently have problems with socialization. Especially it is hard when a man fosters a girl. He should keep his healthy guide's status and escape equality in order to keep balance.

" It's easy to become angry and depressed when loving and committed fathers have to prove they are just that," Peter Ehrlich (2008, p. 18) admits.

#### THE MEANS TO WITHSTAND

In fact, there are special support groups for those who bring their children alone no matter female or male. But certainly there are more women who into the bargain feel more natural and free to express their feelings and emotions. For most of men that method is not available.

Versus the indifference of the officials, single fathers are now actively uniting their forces. And one of especially active representatives of this social group, William McGranaghan has recently organized a special service Dads House within the project Homes for Families and Fathers (Hoff) specially for their companions-in-arms where they can get in touch, spend time with their



offspring and acquire some useful skills like cooking. By summer 2010 it has had already 1, 400 active members. There are other support groups as well, e. g. the one of Pete Wrighton, where men learn to talk and to be honest.

## CONCLUSION

So, the things are not as bad as they may seem on the face of it. However, we have found out that the topic strongly needs further consideration. The attention of employers and officials should be attracted to the issue, and social stereotypes should be discarded gradually. On the one hand, it is hard to disagree with the governmental policy intended to encourage healthy family structures which seem to be more reliable and stable. But the matter is, that is a deceptive impression to date, and, if accepted and assisted, lone fathers are able to bring up much healthier, much happier and much more perspective citizens of future, than two-parented, but unhappy and destructive families where a child receives no care but copies wrong behavioural models. These issues should be deeply learnt by family psychologists and scholars as well. All in all, single fathers' problems in today's London are many, and they should be thoroughly examined by sociologists, demographers, psychologists and pedagogues. In that way they are possible to be solved and unloaded.