



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Psychological aftermath: Exploring the role of the woman as a leader in the Greek monoparental family: Review

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To reassess the social problem of the socially vulnerable group named women leaders of monoparental families in terms of legislation, allowance policy and job benefits, among others.

**Design:** Systematic review.

**Data sources:** 18 electronic and book references as well as high impact journals without geographical restriction up to December 2011 were gathered from International organisations including the EU and OECD.

**Review methods:** A reviewer applied inclusion criteria and extracted data from the latest available reports on monoparental families of Eurostat and OECD. The data came from low-, middle-, and high-income countries. Statistical rates for the proportion of the monoparental families on an international level as well as their possibility of falling below the limit of poverty were employed. Comparison was drawn between two countries under Troika's surveillance.

**Results:** The search identified 2 scientific researches pertaining to the hardships women as leaders of monoparental families encounter. One was conducted from the Research Center for Equality Issues and the other was published in the journal the Rostrum of Asclepius. All outcomes were self reported. It was found that the most severe problems that women as leaders of monoparental families encounter are health ones, the caring and guarding of their children as well as their professional settlement. Yet, the most vital one is the lack of allowance policy. This approach bears fruits in Ireland. It is mandatory that allowance policy along with implementation of other social structures to form a basis for the support of the monoparental families.

**Conclusion:** Future policy concerning monoparental families must focus on establishing legislation and intervention programs that will assist the woman as a leader of the monoparental family to be assimilated in the society. Allowance policy for the mother/father must be reinforced and not abandoned as it happens nowadays.

**Keywords** Monoparental family; Social exclusion; Family deconstruction; Socially vulnerable groups.

### 1. introduction

The accession of Greece to the European Union (EU) was a milestone not only at the economic level, but also, to the demographic one. One of these changes comprises of the increase in the number of the monoparental families (MPF), whose rate is the 3% of all the families in the EU and the 9% of all the families with children. Moreover, there was an overall increase to the number of the extramarital births with their number reaching nearly to 40% in some European

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countries such as France and the United Kingdom of all the births in 2013. In Greece, the respective percentage for 2013 was 4,8%. The vast majority of monoparental families in Europe comprises from women. Greece is not an exception to that as the rate monoparental families with women as the sole parent is 91%<sup>1</sup>.

This type of family is considered to be a paradigm of a socially vulnerable group (SVG) part of the population as it is challenged from two convergent axes. First, the family responsibilities and second the conditions of its working life. These pressures have severe impacts on the way a single parent confronts her/his former spouse, the family and social assistance networks, the welfare legislations, as well as the potentiality to have access to welfare services<sup>1</sup>.

Within the framework of the limited number of social and financial benefits linked to the working life of the MPF, the state takes special care so as to reassure decent living standards to the MPF. Some of these benefits are allowances, housing loans, priority to the matriculation of the child in nursery schools, training programs targeting to integration and reintegration to production line, as well as psychological support and funding of young entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup>.

The report of the European Communities (EC) (Report of the Community for monoparental families 1989) defines the MPF as the family in which a parent without a spouse lives with at least one unmarried and dependent from him child, and perhaps with other individuals, for instance, their parental family<sup>2</sup>. Table 1 presents the percentage of dependent children in MPFs in Greece for 2010 according to OECD's data.

**Table 1** Percentage of children living with various types of households<sup>3</sup>.

	Percentage of children living with:				Total	% of children in multigenerational households
	0 parents	1 parent	2 cohabiting parents	2 married parents		
Australia	2,6	16,8	81,0		100	:
Austria	2,2	14,3	7,4	76,1	100	7,5
Belgium	2,5	16,2	13,7	67,7	100	2,2
Canada	0,0	22,1	11,0	66,9	100	:
Czech Republic	0,6	14,9	8,2	76,3	100	7,7
Denmark	1,5	17,9	15,1	65,6	100	0,4
Estonia	1,9	21,8	23,9	52,5	100	12,0
Finland	0,9	14,4	15,8	68,9	100	0,6
France	0,9	13,5	21,0	64,5	100	1,8
Germany	1,3	15,0	5,5	78,2	100	0,9
Greece	1,2	5,3	1,2	92,3	100	6,5
Hungary	0,8	15,4	9,9	73,9	100	11,6
Ireland	1,9	24,3	5,9	67,9	100	4,5
Italy	0,8	10,2	5,2	83,9	100	5,0
Japan	0,0	12,3	87,7		100	:
Luxembourg	0,3	10,2	6,9	82,6	100	2,8
Netherlands	0,3	11,1	13,1	75,5	100	0,3
New Zealand	0,0	23,7	76,3		100	:
Poland	0,8	11,0	9,2	79,0	100	22,0
Portugal	2,9	11,9	9,7	75,5	100	11,6
Slovak Republic	1,1	10,6	3,7	84,7	100	17,6
Slovenia	0,6	10,4	19,5	69,4	100	13,7

Spain	1,2	7,2	7,9	83,7	100	5,8
Sweden	1,3	17,6	30,5	50,6	100	0,3
Switzerland	0,1	15,2	84,7		100	:
United Kingdom	1,4	21,5	12,6	64,5	100	3,4
United States	3,5	25,8	2,9	67,8	100	:
<b>OECD27 average</b>	<b>1,3</b>	<b>14,9</b>	<b>11,3</b>	<b>72,5</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>6,6</b>

Source: Iacovou and Skew (2010), Household Structure in the EU.

(Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Doing Better for Families. Paris: OECD; 2011. 37 p.)

**Table 2** Household composition in the EU-27 in 2011<sup>4</sup>.

Total Adult (1000)		Single person		Two adults		Three or more	
% of total private households		with children	without children	with children	without children	with children	without children
EU-27	211 043.4	4.4	31.4	21.0	24.7	6.0	12.6
BE	4 653.1	5.8	30.9	18.9	23.1	8.6	12.8
BG	28521	2.3	30.5	16.4	24.4	8.5	17.9
CZ	4 432.8	4.7	27.2	23.7	26.2	5.5	12.7
DK	2 323.6	10.1	40.7	18.7	24.2	2.4	4.0
DE	39 881.8	4.0	39.4	16.2	28.8	3.1	8.4
EE	559.	6.7	33.8	21.6	20.1	6.6	11.3
IE	1687.7	7.3	21.4	29.0	20.6	66	15.2
EL	4371.4	1.8	27.5	23.0	24.3	4.9	18.6
ES	173447	3.0	19.1	26.1	22.0	8.6	21.3
FR	27 526.4	5.5	34.3	22.2	27.1	3.5	7.4
IT	251459	2.4	31.1	22.7	20.6	6.1	17.2
CY	297.6	3.2	19.1	27.2	24.3	8.3	18.0
LV	829.	6.5	27.9	17.7	17.3	12.0	187
LT	13925	6.9	34.7	19.8	16.8	8.3	13.5
LU	211.2	5.0	32.2	27.6	24.0	4.0	7.1
HU	3 777.1	3.9	23.6	21.1	22.0	9.3	20.1
MT	140.5	2.5	17.2	24.6	20.5	11.4	23.9
NL	7 366.3	4.0	35.1	22.7	30.1	2.8	5.2
AT	36497	2.9	36.3	17.9	23.0	6.3	13.6
PL	13 595.7	3.6	20.7	24.6	20.7	13.3	17.1
PT	4 008.9	3.8	18.9	24.8	22.5	9.3	20.7
RO	7 426.8	2.1	20.9	23.4	19.3	15.4	18.8
SI	829.8	3.2	29.2	23.6	20.1	7.4	16.5
SK	1 789.1	3.2	20.8	24.1	19.5	12.5	19.9

FI	2 531.5	1.7	39.6	19.7	31.7	2.0	5.3
SE	4 541.4	6.1	49.9	18.4	21.7	1.8	2.2
UK	27 877.8	7.7	32.8	18.9	25.8	4.4	10.3
HR	1 639	1.5	27.5	13.9	23.1	11.7	22.4
MK	547.7	1.8	9.6	23.2	139	27.0	24.5
TR	19 606.6	2.3	8.5	38.5	16.1	19.6	15.1

(Source: European Commission. Eurostat. Household Composition Statistics [Internet]. 2011 [cited 2014 Apr 10]. Available from: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Household\\_composition\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Household_composition_statistics). Table 2: Private households by household composition, 2011 (number of households in 1 000 and % of household types). Source: Eurostat (**lfst hhnhtych**).

The definition *monoparental family* is widely used since the middle of the decade of 1960. With the later increase of the above-mentioned families the question that was posited was whether these families comprise of an alternative way of family organization or a new type of family. At the same time, the need for differentiating the definition of monoparentality as this particular definition is informative with reference to the structure of the family but not regarding their different types of the monoparental family as those are associated to its constant changes <sup>2</sup>.

Despite the fact that this particular family structure is not a recent phenomenon, only the latest years there has been noted a strong interest for the problems and needs of the MPFs as well as attempts of intervention. This change of stance is an outcome of the difficulties these families confront, especially those with a woman as a leader. These difficulties are related mainly to the insufficiency of the social welfare and social policy, unemployment which by default is higher in women, the lack of adequate childhood protection, and the like. The evolution of the family to this new structure is basically related to an increase in divorces, extramarital births, civil partnership, a decrease in marriage, as well as a decline in births <sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, it is worthy to note that at least partly advances in biotechnology are responsible for monoparentality as it allows artificial insemination to take place. Additionally, the change of the position of the woman in contemporary societies comparing to that of the past decades plays an equally important role. According to statistics and demographic data for the EU, monoparentality is a reality which will become more visible statistically and socially. In fact, this picture does not exactly represent the reality in Greece since there are noted lower rates of monoparentality especially to what it concerns the number of sole fathers who comprise of a minority in Greece when compared to the rates of other countries <sup>2</sup>. Table 2 presents the rate of MPFs under the label single person with children in household type in the EU of the 27 member states in 2011, according to Eurostat. In Greece, 1.8% of the private household was MPF.

The aim of this article is to review the social problem of women as leaders of MPFs. References are selected in order to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on the hardships MPFs encounter. Conclusions are reached on the basis of the latest facts.

## 2. Socioeconomic & psycho-emotional problems

### 2.1. Social

The increase of MPFs is one of the most visible and intense demographic tendencies the past three decades, globally. Prior research showed that unmarried mothers and their children specifically become the center stage of welfare policy. This is due to the fact that the former are related to situations that create severe social concern as they are frequently accused of being the cause of social instability <sup>5</sup>.

Ford and Millar argue that MPFs are considered to be one of the basic factors which leads to the breakdown of the society and to the development of a lesser class. The offsprings of unmarried mothers encounter a socialization deficit pertaining to the low level of educational success, job findings, and the increasing criminality rate <sup>6</sup>.

### 2.2. Ethical

In a conversation with the Research Center for Equality Issues (RCEI) (March 2014) showed that the attitude of the Greek society towards unmarried mothers is rather hard. Specifically, participants expressed critical and rather negative opinions for the female leaders of the MPFs and particularly for unmarried mothers. The study showed that the social cycle of unmarried mothers consistently comments critically on the former. The notion that a woman is or

decides to become unmarried mother causes irritation and terror at the same time. It is evident that negative comments are mostly related to her decision without taking into consideration the circumstances that deterred her to act differently. Subsequently, there is a stereotypical opinion and judgment regarding the issue and any deviation from the norm results in the social exclusion of these women with all its consequences. The replies of the participants as well as the testimonies of the unmarried mothers who visited RCEI show the following. Greek society contents that unmarried motherhood is reprehensible and that these women by all means should be avoided by potential spouses as they insult their moral values. Moreover, participants noted that public opinion must be informed on the discrimination these women suffer from. Dissemination of such information might decisively contribute to overcome prejudices and by extension to overcome the social exclusion unmarried mothers encounter.

### **2.3. Financial**

In the majority of the cases, unmarried mothers live below poverty level for various reasons; namely, due to lack of job or other factors that do not allow her to work such as the growing of MPF or due to the fact her income is not adequate for the amelioration of their quality of life. Thus, unmarried mothers seek help to the Greek Welfare Service whose financial help is inadequate or to various other Non-Governmental Organizations for allowance and material assistance.

Monoparental families are synonymous to poverty as the increasing number of MPFs is linked to the increasing rate of poverty. Thus, the problem of unmarried mothers is dual. First, unmarried mothers are considered to be a threat to the society, morally and financially, as are members of a lower social class. Second, unmarried mothers are considered to be a social problem; that is individuals who want to work, yet, they are obstructed by external factors <sup>7</sup>.

### **2.4. Familial**

Mousourou postulates that the family of the unmarried mothers undoubtedly plays an essential role to their life course and development. The family of unmarried mothers should stand by them and make them understand that they have a faithful ally and supporter in every step they make. Then, women leaders of the MPF are able ethically and emotionally to stand to the occasion and progress within a hostile social environment <sup>8</sup>.

Crucially, should the family of the woman leader of the MPF holds a negative stance this can bring opposite of the abovementioned results or even prove to be fatal for the unmarried mother. If the unmarried mother is not able to find the necessary for her family warmth to the family of her parents that she so much needs at this point of her life, the most possible aftermath is irreversible effects to be created for her and her child. Unmarried mothers need to feel safety from her parental family. This type of safety cannot be replaced from elsewhere, other wise she will not be able to feel strong towards the critical stance of her social environment, when she knows that she receives the same criticism from her own home <sup>8</sup>.

### **2.5. Psychological and Emotional**

Maratou-Alipranti claims that the sentimental load an unmarried woman carries is greater even to that she experienced during her own pregnancy. During her pregnancy there is an unbearable ethical dilemma that the unmarried mother often finds herself in. Particularly, she is drowned in queries on whether she has to discontinue her pregnancy or not. She also worries for the stance of the public opinion towards her and her family once the child is born. Needless to say that the unmarried pregnant women suffocates when she thinks of how her life will be from now on and onwards and the reaction of her family when they will be announced this rather important issue for the life of their daughter <sup>9</sup>.

Maratou-Alipranti contends that the unmarried mother takes seriously into consideration the thought of the child that she will bring to the world, the child's confrontation as well as his/her acceptance from her close relatives. In addition, in the majority of the cases the unmarried pregnant woman worries for the financial hardships she will have to face. The former alongside the unwanted pregnancy add to her an unbearable load which is very difficult for her to cope with. Consequently, the unmarried woman leader of the MPF is most of the times led to psychological stalemate which is expressed with extreme reactions such as suicide attempts and depression <sup>9</sup>.

In spite of the lack of the official and consistent records of the problems MPFs face in Greece, postulates the basic ones as following. The low family income due to increased family obligations, health problems, issues in the caring and custody of the children, lack of familiarization and information regarding the welfare system and job market, reduced professional skills and experience, inability of access to job market, high rate of long-term unemployment, involvement in atypical kinds of job, and difficulties in harmonizing familial and working life <sup>9</sup>.

### 3. Legislation

#### 3.1. Greece

The marriage institution in Greece is influenced by recent modern variations of the family and reproductive behaviors, namely low rates of fertility and marriageness, respectively. On the contrary, the rates of divorces and of new types of civil partnership as well as extramarital births increased. As a consequence, the family nucleus of two parents goes over to more individualized structures such as MPFs and free civil partnerships <sup>9</sup>.

By Maratou-Alipranti, it is noted that the percentage of MPFs as compared to the total number of families with children is lower in Greece and the countries of Southern Europe. On the contrary, the rest of the EU member states and particularly the Northern ones have a considerable increase in MPFs.<sup>10</sup> According to Eurostat, the overwhelming majority, that is in EU member states nearly 90% of the leaders of MPFs are women. It is mandatory that the Greek state should design a framework via which welfare policy will cope with the needs of the constantly changing social reality. Yet, it is ascertained shortage of specialized institutional framework capable of sufficiently supporting MPFs in Greece <sup>9</sup>.

The current legal framework for the support of MPFs in Greece consists of benefits regarding the allowance policy, nursery schools, summer camps, and hospitality and support units.

In statutory Law 1329/1983 for the reformation of Family Law, the unmarried mother is legally treated in terms of the rights and obligations to the married mother. Furthermore, with the same law came the absolute equation of the rights of the children that were born without marriage of their parents to those that were born within the marriage as well as the legal reinforcement of the unmarried mother. In statutory Law 1483/1984 it is provided the administration of parental leave for the rearing of the child for up to six months and to the mother single parent. In statutory Law 1849/1989 it is provided the conferral of marriage allowance to the leaders of the MPFs of the private sector as well. In statutory Law 2190/1994 it is provided that if among the successful candidates of a contest for the vacancies filling in the public sector are unmarried mothers then in the final grade of the latter is added an extra 5% for each child. In statutory Law 2470/1997 it is provided the marriage allowance to the leaders of the MPFs of the private sector, if they are assigned the custody of the child <sup>10</sup>.

According to the Collective Labor Agreement for the years 2002-2003 the employed single parent in the private sector is eligible for paid leave of six working days per year, irrespectively of the one who is eligible form other statutory laws. A parent with three or more children is eligible for paid leave of eight working days per year. This leave is granted due to increased needs for the rearing of the children who is 12 years of age or is in the process of completing her or his 12 years of age. It is granted at once or partly upon communicating with the employer and according to the needs of the parent. Monoparental leave must not coincide with the beginning or the ending of the annual regular leave <sup>10</sup>.

The legal framework associated with allowances, supporting services and other facilitations for these families is considered to be rather limited. These programs are classified to the wider ones that are implemented for the protection of the family.

#### 3.2. Allowance Policy

There are three sources from where unmarried mothers and by extension MPFs can receive financial assistance. First public assistance from the state in the form of allowance, second help form the father of the children (if they exist or reported), and third form the income of their own job <sup>11</sup>.

With reference to the financial support of the MPFs with low income, it is provided their inclusion either to the programme of financial invigoration (although this program does not regard the MPFs per se, rather than the unprotected children) or to the reinforcement program for families “in crisis”. Furthermore, it is provided the granting of some other allowances, which are widely addressed to families with low income including the MPF ones.

Specifically, the financial reinforcement and support of MPFs with low income includes the following. The Welfare Directorates of the Prefectures Local Governments deposit monthly allowance of €44 to each unprotected child up to the age of 16 provided that the monthly family income does not exceed for a three-member family the amount of €294 increased by €24 for each member and subtracting the amount that possibly deposits for rent <sup>12</sup>.

The school allowance is addressed to families, MPFs included, which have children up to the age of 16 who attend compulsory education at public schools. Their annual income that must not overcome €3.000 and it is €300 annually for each child-student of the compulsory education. The reinforcement is deposited lump sum with the beginning of each school year. The deposit is performed by the relevant Public Financial Service (PFS) of the beneficiary's abode <sup>1</sup>.

The Welfare Directorates service of the Prefectures Local Governments of the country also grants the Allowance for Uninsured Motherhood (AUM). AUM is deposited according to the article 4 paragraph 5 of the statutory Law 1302/1982 to employed women who do not have the prerogative to a respective grant from social security or they are uninsured. The level of allowance is €440 (€220 before and after labor) <sup>1</sup>.

The Organization for Agricultural Insurance (OAI) on the basis of the statutory Laws 1892/1990 and 2459/1997 grants allowance for the third child. The monthly allowance is €164 and it is deposited up to the completion of the 6 years of age, provided that the beneficiaries' annual family income is up to €23.480 <sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, the Ministry of Health via the Welfare Directorates service of the Prefectures Local Governments of the country provides free hospital and medical insurance to the unmarried mothers and to the financially weak ones <sup>1</sup>. However, the hospital and medical insurance of the Welfare Directorates is not free as there is a percentage of contribution.

In statutory Law 1469/1984, the uninsured divorced has the right for hospital and medical care as direct insured to the social security carrier to whom the former spouse was insured when their marriage was dissolved. This social security right is exerted within a year from the date of the final version of the divorce resolution <sup>12</sup>.

### 3.3. Nursery Schools

On the basis of the Operation Rules of the Legal Entities of the Municipal Nursery Schools (Π2β/2827/1997, Article 7) the children of the MPFs are matriculated by priority to the Nursery Schools of the Regional Administration and Local Government Organizations as well as to the schools of the Medicosocial Center (IAK) (former Patriotic Institute for Social Welfare and Perception (PIKPA)), of the EOP, and of the Institute of Nursery Schools in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Larissa <sup>1</sup>.

### 3.4. Hospitality and Support Units.

The Legal Entity of Private Law *Center for the Protection of Children in Attica 'I Mitera' (The Mother)* operates specialized department for the systematic protection of the unmarried mother, where unmarried mothers are hosted until parturition. The Center provides psychological support and financial help until it is ascertained that she can live with her own means and undertake the rearing of her child. RCEI provides Centers for the Information and Counselling of Women where women leaders of MPFs can have legal, psychological, and counselling support. Furthermore, the Welfare Directorates of the Prefectures Local Governments via the Social Service can offer psychological support and help to the unmarried mother. Within the framework of the National Center for Social Solidarity they are provided guest rooms for the temporary hosting of the women as leader of MPFs in Athens and Thessaloniki. Last but not least, in the Archdiocese of Athens there is the Mother's Shelter: Reception and Information Center where unmarried mothers can seek help <sup>1</sup>.

### 3.5. Other Benefits

Moreover, the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) treats women leaders of MPFs with priority in its employment programs by funding job vacancies and reinforcing entrepreneurship. Besides this, the Community framework for State aid for research and development via the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Welfare implemented the entrepreneurial program "Employment and Professional Training" within the framework of which integrated interventions for women leaders of MPFs are provided, as well <sup>1</sup>.

### 3.6. Ireland

Ireland is an EU member state which was also under the Troika's Memorandum of Understanding as it is a PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) country. Ireland is famous for its prominent social welfare system. Yet, the immense difference between Greece and Ireland is that the Irish government opted to not attack its social welfare system. Nonetheless, Greek governments macerated the social welfare system. There are numerous differences between the two social welfare systems with reference to MPFs. To begin with, the most significant difference among the two systems is that for an MPF to qualify for the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) the income limit must be €425 or less per week, that is circa €1.700 or less per month and satisfy a means test. Unfortunately, the age limit from 2015

and onwards will be 7 years of age. Greek income rules are stricter as the income for an MPF must not exceed €294 for a three-member family and it is given to the mother until the child becomes 16 years old <sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, the Irish Department of Social Protection (DSP) informs MPFs of the date of termination of the OFP allowance and outlines options under other schemes and supports which may be available to MPFs. Another difference between the two countries is that if the salary of the single parent is reduced then s/he is entitled to an increase of the OFP <sup>13</sup>.

Last but not least, the OFP allowance is €188 per week, circa €752 per month for the single mother or father plus €29,80 per week, circa €119,20 per month for each dependent child. Nevertheless, in Greece the Welfare Directorate gives only €44 per month for the child and no financial support for the mother <sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. Social exclusion

Social exclusion is defined as the obstruction of access to goods, which by its turn leads to financial poverty and marginalization. The most basic goods that MPFs are forfeited are working life, accommodation, education, and access to services. This definition includes the circumstances and the process that threatens individuals and teams who are victims of discrimination, have experienced severe setback and the potentials for improving their social position are limited.<sup>14</sup> Eurostat confirms that the household type of a single person with dependent children, i.e. MPFs, is the population with the higher rate of at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE index) in the EU of the 27 member states in 2011.

According to this definition the MPFs with women as a leader are more exposed to the abovementioned factors. Hence, women as leaders of MPFs consist of a high risk group in relation to social exclusion <sup>14</sup>. This is affirmed by Eurostat as a single female parent in Greece is the 25,8% of the total population and by extension is at a higher risk of poverty than the respective single male parent who consist of the 24,3% of the total population, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** At-risk-of-poverty rate by household type, 2011<sup>16</sup>.

	Single Female	Single Male	Single Person	-Single person with dependent children -Two adults with three or more dependent children		Two adults at least one aged 65 years or over	Total
EU-28	26.5	24.6	25.7	34.6	25.4	12.5	16.9
<b>Belgium</b>	22.3	20.4	21.4	38.5	16.7	22.0	15.4
<b>Bulgaria</b>	59.9	35.2	51.2	35.4	78.2	24.7	22.2
Czech Republic	21.2	13.7	18.2	35.6	23.9	2.7	9.8
Denmark	25.6	29.1	27.3	20.6	11.7	11.2	13.0
Germany	32.2	32.3	32.3	37.1	16.2	10.3	15.9
Estonia	21.6	36.1	26.5	34.2	25.4	9.3	17.4
Ireland	16.9	33.4	24.7	32.9	18.0	8.4	15.2
Greece	25.8	24.3	25.2	43.2	20.8	22.3	21.3
Spain	25.4	20.9	23.4	39.8	45.8	19.8	22.2
France	18.8	19.6	19.1	33.9	22.1	6.8	13.8
Croatia	45.7	34.8	42.1	40.6	26.3	24.6	21.3
Italy	28.0	17.7	23.9	35.7	36.7	13.7	19.6
Cyprus	40.9	20.3	32.9	15.2	17.2	33.5	14.8
Latvia	14.3	33.8	20.4	39.1	35.2	11.0	19.2
Lithuania	21.4	33.1	25.1	44.0	38.4	6.6	19.2



Luxembourg	13.9	17.0	15.4	45.5	25.7	2.9	13.6
Hungary	12.2	23.6	15.7	29.9	33.0	3.0	13.8
Malta	20.7	25.7	22.7	47.2	32.2	21.2	15.4
Netherlands	14.9	18.1	16.4	33.9	19.1	6.0	11.0
Austria	26.4	20.5	23.9	26.2	23.0	11.7	12.6
Poland	22.7	31.6	25.5	29.8	34.6	11.7	17.6
Portugal	28.0	26.4	27.5	27.9	34.5	19.5	18.0
Romania	26.7	17.2	23.6	40.0	54.7	9.6	22.2
Slovenia	43.0	35.8	40.0	30.8	18.2	10.4	13.6
Slovakia	16.8	23.7	18.7	26.4	32.6	3.2	13.0
Finland	32.2	32.8	32.5	21.9	15.2	6.3	13.7
Sweden	35.5	24.0	30.2	35.9	15.4	6.6	14.0
United Kingdom	28.2	21.8	25.4	33.5	21.5	17.7	16.2
Iceland	16.0	22.5	19.4	28.4	8.0	2.7	9.2
Norway	29.3	25.0	27.1	19.1	9.8	1.4	10.4
Switzerland	27.6	15.2	22.5	32.4	26.0	23.2	15.1

(Source: European Commission. Eurostat. Quality of life indicators - material living conditions [Internet]. 2013 Oct [cited 2014 Apr 10] Available from: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Quality\\_of\\_life\\_indicators\\_-\\_material\\_living\\_conditions](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Quality_of_life_indicators_-_material_living_conditions). Table 1: At-risk-of-poverty rate by household type, 2011 (% of total population). Source: Eurostat, EU SILC (ilc\_li03).)

The most significant factors of social exclusion are unemployment and specifically long-term unemployment, immigration, illiteracy, insufficient protection of the MPFs, crisis of family institution, gradual decline of the value system, cultural and religious difference, gender inequality, social delinquency, physical deformity, and mental retardation <sup>14</sup>.

The main factor that correlates MPFs with the possibility of social exclusion is their status on the income scale since most of the MPFs are enlisted to the lower ranks. Furthermore, there is a high contingency for MPFs to supervene in poverty status. Similarly, their quality of life is affected by various factors such as the accommodation issue. What is more, women leaders of MPFs face problems regarding the health, the caring, and the guarding of their children as well as their professional settlement. There are also hardships corollaries of the inability of the MPFS to assimilate themselves in the social and cultural environment <sup>14</sup>.

#### 4.1. Social Needs

Antonopoulou-Kostourou investigated the social needs of MPFs in Greece. The sample consisted of 206 single parents, 181 women and 25 men. The mean age of the leaders in MPFs was 44 years of age. 41,7% of the participants had one child, whereas 41,3% two. As far as the educational level of the participants is concerned 39,3% of the participants were high school graduates <sup>17</sup>.

The need for psychological support was expressed by 66,1% of the leaders of the MPFs. 27,2% of them sought psychological support to the state, 20,9% to the church, 18,0% to the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), and 32,5% of them expressed the need for finding a job <sup>17</sup>.

Leaders of MPFs expressed other types of needs such as cultural and athletic (24,7%), caring of their babies and infants (17,1%), educational (15,5%), support of individuals with special needs (9,2%), and accommodation (11,2%) <sup>17</sup>.

Leaders of the MPFs stated that in their needs are assisted by their own family up to a percent of 80,1%. Particularly, leaders of MPFs sought help to their own families for the guarding of their children (64,2%), for ethical support (81,2%) and for material support (50,3%) <sup>17</sup>.

## 5. Medical implications

Women as leaders of MPFs, who possess a booklet of uninsured person from the Welfare Directorates of the Prefectures Local Governments, are unable to pay their monetary contribution to the very expensive Diagnosed-Related Groups (DRGs - KEN) and the medicines, due to the financial hardships they face.

Another parameter of the health crisis that women as leaders of MPFs face is the issue of vaccination. Women as leaders of the MPFs receive only a €44 allowance. Therefore, the uninsured mother and child cannot spend the aforementioned allowance in vaccinating the child. Thus, non-vaccinated children consist of public peril. NGOs like the Doctors of the World substitute the role of the State in the National Vaccination Program, which has broken down since uninsured parents cannot vaccinate their children if they do not pay for the vaccine. In fact, the Doctors of the World state that the current medical system does not permit to all to be vaccinated and therefore protect their health as well as the public health in general. This situation as Mr Mouzalas, gynaecologist, member of the MdM-Greece's Board of Directors characteristically states that it creates "armies of future patients". As a consequence, they have vaccinated a limited number of children<sup>18</sup>. Last but not least, in a conversation with IAK centers (March 2014) where women leaders of MPFs have the opportunity to vaccinate their children for free, this is not currently an option because the Ministry of Health has not ordered and sent vaccines for the uninsured children. Let us now proceed to the discussion.

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## 6. Discussion

The MPFs issue must be a priority for every country. As a social worker, I daily face the analgesia of the Greek state and the multilevel exhaustion these women undergo. Many times I met women who could not even feel the happiness of their pregnancy due to the shortage of support from the Greek state. Greece has not enacted to Family Law special rules for MPFs unlike to other EU countries. Professionals of mental health realize the heavy load MPFs carry. Indeed, we try to find ways to reinforce the women's role and stress the positive aspect in an inert and abusing state.

It is not random that for the awareness of the society regarding MPFs except for NGOs, there are not official institutions that protect them and promote the problem to the community. Furthermore, currently conduction of research that will show the length of the problem so as for the intervention necessity to be exhibited is not observed. There are no organized policies rather that temporary actions that of course they more of exacerbate than solve the problem.

The state must protect the child and the family in different way. Each child must grow up harmonically, to live in an environment free of material and sentimental deprivations. Besides, children are the adults of tomorrow. As such the main concern of every organized and awaked society must the protection of children.

We should hope that the policies of our country will look at this problem with sensitivity and will establish beneficial and innovative changes for the defense of the monoparental families within the Greek territory.

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## 7. Conclusion

This paper examines the role of the woman as the head of the Greek single-parent family. It aims to outline the Greek single-parent family by analyzing its psychosocial, economic and clinical elements.

First, there is a reference to the fact of demographic changes which have contributed to the increase of single-parent families headed by women, in Europe and in Greece. The definition of a single-parent family is clarified and a reference is made to the causes that shape the family with one parent.

Then, the difficulties faced by women-leaders are highlighted, which are related to social, moral, financial, family, as well as emotional-psychological problems.

Then, the existing legislative framework that applies to the support of these women is analyzed by examining all sources of financial assistance and other support programs.

The reason why this report is made is to better understand the functioning of the single-parent family, highlighting its similarities and peculiarities compared to other countries of the European Union. Specifically, Ireland was chosen for comparison with Greece as it is a northern European country and the only northern country that joined the supervision of the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund). However, Ireland is a model country in the creation of social policy from the establishment of its state and yet it took care to preserve and

protect it, in contrast to Greece which not only did not protect it but also shrunk it. Therefore, in our own country the effects and changes at the social, economic and medical level are more intense and deeper than in Ireland.

Furthermore, the definition and causes of social exclusion are given and the way of its connection with single parenthood is explained. In this direction, the main aspects of the difficulty of accessing social, financial and medical goods are mentioned. Characteristically, a recent study on the effect of single parenthood on the social needs of the only parent is mentioned and the results and conclusions of the specific research are presented epigrammatically.

In the continuation of the paper, the difficulties faced by women-leaders in Greece during the economic crisis are highlighted. The lack of state structures, with the existing ones being under-functioning, exacerbates and perpetuates their problems. The health system, which in turn has shown pain in recent years, comes to make it difficult once again for these mothers who experience daily social exclusion and marginalization, especially when they are unemployed and uninsured.

I hope that with this work I touched even faintly on a special and sensitive social issue with all its dimensions, that of monogamy and social exclusion. Finally, as a citizen but also as a Social Worker at the Social Grocery Store and Pantry of the National Network SOS Society, which are based in all the local governments of the municipalities of the country, I come daily in contact and at an impasse with this particular socially vulnerable group which is in a situation crisis. This group struggles every day to first meet the subsistence needs of their minor children such as food, shelter, care and then their legal needs. I hope that at some point the state will take care of its citizens who experience daily an unprecedented and different social exclusion in health, nutrition, work, and education.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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