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## **SINGLE PARENTS IN TRANSFORMATION: A SOCIAL RESEARCH STUDY**

*Abstract. This study presents social research based on analysis of different aspects in everyday life of single-parent families living in Almaty (Kazakhstan). The authors focus on a model of this family type in terms of its social and economic adaptation, explaining how a single parent can organise and combine family life and child raising with his/her work parallel to achieving the economic independence of his/her family. The article presents the findings of a study on lifestyles in single-parent families, strategies for their survival, and problems related to the transition to a market economy. In addition to several typical reasons for the emergence of single-parent families, which largely include divorces, the unwillingness of partners to start a family, and planned pregnancies for the purpose of giving birth to children outside of marriage, one should note the phenomenon of unofficial marriages, which are entered into only as part of a religious rite. This phenomenon is typical of Kazakhstan. Studies consistently demonstrate that single mothers are in quite an unfavourable economic situation, which is aggravated in social terms by the current economic in Kazakhstan. Extended families and informal social ties are the most important source of economic, emotional and psychological support for this type of family in Kazakhstan.*

*Keywords: family relationships, parenthood, single-parent family, marriage, gender*

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### **Introduction**

The growing prevalence of single-parent families determines the need to explore this alternative family form along with its strengths and weaknesses. Experts, scientists, politicians and representatives of public associations believe this trend has a great impact on society.

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The nuclear family has lost its central role in our changing world (Skolnick and Skolnick, 1991); this is a fact today. In this context, it is difficult to define what a family generally means. Which distinguishing criteria should be considered when seeking to define this concept? Considering 'marriage' as a legal norm regulated by states, 'family' is more a philosophical concept defined by thinkers (Smart, 2009).

Various research works have sought to provide a modern interpretation of transformations in families, their consequences for people and the well-being of children brought up in single-parent families (Weitzman, 1985; Greif, 1985; Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986; Amato, 1987; Amato, 2000; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Wallerstein and Kelly, 2008; Miller, 1992; Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Cherlin, 1999; Peterson and Zill, 1986; Amato and Keith, 1991; Burns and Scott, 2013; Thompson and Amato, 1999; Klugman and Motivans, 2001; Bianchi et al., 2006; Peters and Kamp Dush, 2010).

A rise in the number of single-parent families is also observed in Asian countries; this part of the world is definitely influenced by such an alternative family type (Park, 2007; Raymo and Zhou, 2012; Kanata and Banks, 1997; Jordal et al., 2013; Heuveline and Poch, 2006; Park and Raymo, 2013; Raymo et al., 2004).

Post-Soviet Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) stands apart in this respect. Keeping in mind the uniqueness of each country, one should not forget their common Soviet past, followed by a long transformation period. As a result, all of these countries have faced very similar development problems (Kolerov, 2006).

Kazakhstan is the largest Central Asian country; its land area is equal in size to that of the European Union. Despite its huge territory (in terms of its land area, Kazakhstan ranks ninth in the world), the country's population density is one of the lowest in the world. According to official statistics, at the beginning of 2016 the country's population was 17.7 million. There are two dominant ethnic groups in Kazakhstan: ethnic Kazakhs (66.48%) and ethnic Russians (20.61%), with a wide array of other groups being represented (12.9%). More than half the population (57%) lives in cities and 43% lives in rural areas (Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017).

This social research study was conducted in Almaty, the biggest city in Kazakhstan. Almaty is the country's former capital with slightly over 1.7 million people, making up 9% of the population of Kazakhstan.

This study presents social research based on analysis of different aspects of the everyday life of single-parent families. The authors focus on a model of this family type in terms of its social and economic adaptation, explaining how a single parent can organise and combine family life and child raising

with his/her work parallel to achieving the economic independence of his/her family.

## Methods and materials

This social research was based on in-depth interviews. A qualitative study with semi-structured interviews was conducted in order to explore various views of single parents on the social and economic adaptation of single-parent families.

*Content analysis* was used as an analytical method with a view to obtaining complete and in-depth descriptions of different views expressed by participants. This process included several readings of the text and a definition of elements related to values or episodes pursuant to the research objectives. Elements related to values and episodes were compressed and further reduced to codes that were finally grouped into categories and subcategories based on interview-content similarity (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004).

*Selection criteria:* single mothers and fathers with a different socio-economic status raising a minor child (children) (Table 1).

The authors conducted 33 interviews with respondents: 28 interviews were with women aged between 18 and 47 (the participants' mean age was 34 years); 5 interviews were conducted with men aged between 41 and 56.

*Ethics of experimental research.* Potential respondents were informed about the research purpose, relevant data collection procedures and confidentiality of all information received. After that, verbal confirmation of their consent to voluntary participation in the research was obtained. In order to ensure confidentiality, the interviews were conducted in a secluded place. All interviews were performed after obtaining the consent of each respondent; the names of all respondents have been altered.

Table 1: QUALITATIVE COMPOSITION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Marital status	Education	Children, age
1	Mariyash	Woman	47	single	secondary vocational	1 child, 6 years old
2	Aida	woman	20	single	general secondary	1 child, 1.5 years old
3	Saule	woman	21	single	general secondary	1 child, 8 months
4	Ayman	woman	19	single	secondary vocational	1 child, 1 year old
5	Elmir	Man	52	divorced	secondary vocational	2 children, 15 years old and 10 years old

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Marital status	Education	Children, age
6	Yaroslav	Man	55	divorced	secondary vocational	4 children (15, 12, 10 and 7 years old)
7	Beken	Man	56	divorced	secondary vocational	2 children, 11 years old and 8 years old
8	Galiya	woman	42	divorced	secondary vocational	1 child, 9 years old
9	Nargiz	woman	38	divorced	general secondary	1 child, 13 years old
10	Shynar	woman	35	single	secondary vocational	1 child, 8 years old
11	Yulia	woman	42	divorced	secondary vocational	1 child, 9 years old
12	Kunsulu	woman	32	single	higher	1 child, 10 years old
13	Ayman	woman	43	single	higher	1 child, 12 years old
14	Adel'	woman	38	divorced	secondary vocational	1 child, 10 years old
15	Lyazzat	Woman	32	single	higher	1 child, 7 years old
16	Sandugash	Woman	42	divorced	higher	1 child, 11 years old
17	Manshuk	Woman	35	divorced	higher	1 child, 9 years old
18	Moldir	Woman	38	divorced	higher	2 children, 14 years old and 8 years old
19	Mariya	woman	35	divorced	higher	1 child, 6 years old
20	Dina	woman	35	single	secondary vocational	1 child, 7 years old
21	Aziza	woman	38	single	general secondary	1 child, 11 years old
22	Sarah	woman	42	widowed	higher	1 child, 10 years
23	Yerlan	man	52	divorced	secondary vocational	2 children, 15 years old and 10 years old
24	Alexandr	man	41	widowed	general secondary	1 child, 12 years old
25	Irina	Woman	42	divorced	general secondary	2 children, 15 years old and 10 years old
26	Rymkesh	Woman	47	divorced	general secondary	2 children, 16 years old and 10 years old
27	Gulbakhram	Woman	42	single	general secondary	1 child, 14 years old
28	Aydana	Woman	19	single	general secondary	1 child, 1 year old

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Marital status	Education	Children, age
29	Zhazira	Woman	20	single	general secondary	1 child, 7 months
30	Tomiris	Woman	22	single	incomplete higher	1 child, 1 year old
31	Maya	Woman	18	single	general secondary	1 child, 5 months
32	Gafura	Woman	42	single	general secondary	1 child, 12 years old
33	Arai	Woman	35	single	secondary vocational	1 child, 9 years old

Source: compiled from Center for Study of Public opinion (CIOM) data by the authors ([www.ciom.kz](http://www.ciom.kz)).

## Results

Statistical data provided by the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan testify to the growing number of single-parent families in Kazakhstan and, particularly, in Almaty. The formation of single-parent families is determined by the following cases: birth of a child due to a planned or unplanned pregnancy outside of marriage; divorce; death of one of the spouses. The participants in this experimental research also mentioned the above reasons.

Young women (including adolescent girls) experience unplanned pregnancies more often than women of any other age; however, this can happen with any fertile female. Our research shows that some young women aged between 18 and 28 in fact became single mothers due to unplanned pregnancies and the unwillingness of their partners to start a family. This category of women faced the following widespread situation: women considered having an abortion but did not dare to do that because they hoped to start a family with their partners after the child was born. Regretfully, this did not happen.

Another group of single mothers includes those women who deliberately choose single parenthood. Women give birth to children out of wedlock and do not start families with their fathers. Thus, they intentionally become single mothers. Sharyne Merritt and Linda Steiner (1984) studied the situation of single mothers who gave birth to their children out of wedlock and found that most women wanted to have a child but could not find the person with whom they would like to live in marriage. They thus decided to give birth to their children outside of the regulatory sanctions of marriage. This trend is reflected in this research: these are typically older women (aged above 30); they decide they do not need a spouse to raise a child. Alternatively, these women were unable to find a compatible person to marry. Fearing they might exceed the age most in favour of childbirth, such women decide

to give birth to children outside of marriage and then do not always require the recognition of paternity on the part of their fathers.

*I gave birth to my child at the age of 42, as it is now fashionable to say for myself. Age was a problem; as regards health, I was told that if I did not give birth then I would never be able to give birth. No matter how young I looked and how childish my consciousness was, in fact, my biological age already required childbirth. (Mariyash, 47 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, one child aged 6 years)*

In addition, the growing public recognition of cohabitation has led to a new type of family. However, without a formal commitment followed by the regulatory sanctions of marriage, such relationships can end after childbirth (most often), with one of the former partners, most often the woman, remaining with the child. Our study showed that the consequences of an unofficial marriage entered into solely as part of a religious rite (*nikah*) are among common reasons for the emergence of single motherhood. Young adults go to a mosque and become married by way of a religious rite. However, after that rite is administered, they do not make their marriages official before a registrar. Then, sometime later men leave their women; this can occur both before and after childbirth. These marriages are not official, neither partner has legal rights or obligations.

*Most people think I got married. I'm supposed to be married. We do not live together and did not live. We got married only according to Muslim traditions. (Aida, 20 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, one child aged 1.5 years)*

*We have been dating for 5 months. Then he stole me, with my consent. We were married according to Muslim traditions. We did not have a wedding ceremony, however, according to Kazakh traditions we had kudalyk (matchmaking). (Saule, 21 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, eight-month-old baby)*

*We had been dating for 1.5 years; he introduced me to his parents and relatives. But they were unable to organise a wedding. I decided to tell my parents about that situation, but they were against our wedding. Nevertheless, I told them that I would decide by myself. After that, we got married according to Muslim traditions but we parted after the birth of the child. (Ayman, 19 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 1 year)*

Regarding religiosity, another study we conducted using a quantitative approach (a face-to-face survey) demonstrated that active believers were more frequently encountered among the representatives of single-parent families than atheists.

Our study showed that men's economic instability, their inability to provide their families with money, was a common cause of divorce for both men and women. The transformation period and subsequent economic crisis exacerbated this problem for men who are 50 and older today. They obtained their professional education and first work experience in their specialty during the Soviet era. Consequently, they were unable to adapt to the new conditions and thus do not have permanent jobs and stable earnings. The single fathers who participated in this study often mentioned this problem.

*Life has always been difficult for us. Socially, the relationship between generations of people has changed. The world has changed, and adults have continued with their views; we have begun to live in an era of changes. Today, these changes are very strong, terrible and very unpleasant. Many people have not survived in this situation.* (Elmir, 52 y.o. man, divorced, secondary vocational education, two children aged 15 and 10 years)

*After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when factories and enterprises in Almaty collapsed, a lot of young people, skilled workers who worked there, became unemployed. Many of these people failed to find a job. Where are they now? They either sell something at the marketplace or just wash dishes.* (Yaroslav, 55 y.o. man, divorced, secondary vocational education, 4 children aged 15, 12, 10 and 7 years)

*We do not have a crisis; we have uncertainty (mess). Economic crisis implies production, commodity-material values and, at the same time, that something is going wrong. We already have nothing. Almaty used to be an industrial city. I worked at the Kryuchkov plant, which was a textile plant. What they did with such a powerful plant – they erected a trading house instead of it.* (Beken, 56 y.o. man, divorced secondary vocational education, 2 children aged 11 years and 8 years)

Our research findings revealed that some divorced women deliberately decided to raise their children on their own, without the father's involvement or assistance. In some cases when children's fathers do not show a desire to provide material assistance, the mothers do not claim maintenance and reject official financial support that could be given by the father. Single

mothers explain their choice of this strategy by the fear that their children might go and stay with their fathers. Thus, women exonerate men from their paternity-related responsibility and to some extent encourage the irresponsible behaviour of their children's fathers.

*I do not want to claim maintenance because the child will 'take both parts', eventually taking the part of his father. I decided to bring up and educate my child by myself.* (Galiya, 42 y.o. woman, divorced, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 9 years)

*Sometimes you think about finding money from somewhere. You think you can collect the documents and claim maintenance. Then you return to normal thinking and you tell yourself you'd better not do that, you'll find something by yourself, you'll earn money at least by washing dishes.* (Nargiz, 38 y.o. woman, divorced, general secondary education, 1 child aged 13 years)

Our research consistently demonstrates that single mothers are more disadvantaged than married women. The situation is exacerbated by the impact of the economic crisis, manifested in Kazakhstan through depreciation of the national currency (*tenge*). This has resulted in higher prices for goods and services. Hence, single mothers have to set material limits not only for themselves, but also for their children.

*I want my son to go to a sports club, but I cannot afford that because all sports clubs have fees. There are no discounts. Last year, my son went to karate. After the crisis, I cannot afford this possibility. It would be good to organise sports clubs for the poor, either free of charge or at least with discounts.* (Shynar, 35 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 8 years)

*Now I have to limit toys for my daughter. Toys are very expensive. Sometimes I have to buy her favourite toy, spending my last money.* (Yulia, 42 y.o. woman, divorced, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 9 years)

Some single mothers must limit themselves financially so as not to set limits for their children. In such families, the children are not only provided with everything they need, they are not limited in their entertainment, visits to some clubs and circles. Many study participants with children aged 7 to 18 noted their children received additional education: they joined sports clubs or creative art circles, attended fee-based additional classes in certain



subjects. Such children well-being is achieved by the fact that their single parents allocate money for them, restraining themselves in many respects: diverse food, health services, clothing and entertainment.

*My child is provided with everything: he goes to the basketball club, plays computer games with his friends, and watches movies. I would rather refuse to buy something for myself, but I'll spend money on my son.* (Nargiz, 38 y.o. woman, divorced, general secondary education, 1 child aged 13 years)

*I spend most of my money on my child, on his entertainment, on his swimming practice.* (Kunsulu, 32 y.o. woman, single, higher education, 1 child aged 10 years)

*I do not limit my child in anything. I give him full freedom. If he wants to go to the cinema, I allow him to go there with other children and I give him money. He also attends additional language and maths classes.* (Ayman, 43 y.o. woman, single, higher education, 1 child aged 12 years)

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According to our research, there are gender differences in the welfare status of single parents: in the vast majority of cases, the former partners do not provide material assistance to single mothers; in contrast, single fathers are given material assistance by the mothers of their children. Although these women live separately and many already have other families, they still provide financial assistance to their former partners, buy clothes and products for the children, assist in paying for additional education services, and in child-rearing.

Most participants did not mention personal achievements, personal growth, management of their personal lives, or career growth. Women deliberately sacrifice their self-realisation and career growth; they believe it is necessary to devote their lives to their children, who are their sole reason for living.

*I want to raise my son; I want to buy him a house and a car. My future is just this; I do not think about anything else. I think about his marriage, I'll buy him a house. And I'll look after my grandchildren by myself.* (Adel', 38 y.o. woman, divorced, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 10 years)

*Children are the reason for living. Kazakhs say that, if you do not have children, then fate has not worked out, you are left alone, and you will die alone; after death, such a person does not leave offspring behind.*

(Galiya, 42 y.o. woman, divorced, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 9 years)

*I do not want to make a career. Only my child matters. The most important thing for me is to raise my child, and that's it.* (Kunsulu, 32 y.o. woman, single, higher education, 1 child aged 10 years)

*I want to devote my life more to my child. At the moment, I am thinking of this: my child should get an education and start a family.* (Shynar, 35 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 8 years)

Single mothers do not want to marry; they are afraid of commencing a family because they believe the child would feel uncomfortable. They think that stepfathers always oppress children and scold them. Therefore, as a result, it will be difficult for them to choose between their husbands and the children. This fact also confirms the self-restriction of women when promoting their personal family well-being.

*I do not want to start a family for the sake of the child. After all, the next day, when I go to work, he will scold the child and I will have to look at his mood. Thus, I will depend either on the mood of the child or on my husband's mood. It's better to leave our life intact. At this time, I live my life for my child; I do not consider myself to be a single mother.* (Lyazzat, 32 y.o. woman, single, higher education, 1 child aged 7 years)

*Women seem to be in a vicious circle: work, their child, their house, and everything repeats again. Many women do not really have a life of their own. Some certainly manage to arrange their own lives but this leads to sacrificing their families. The truth is much closer than you think. My neighbour started a family and brought a man to her house. He yells at her child, they fight pretty much constantly. I do not want anyone to yell at my child. I'd rather sacrifice my personal life, for the child's peace of mind. My child's psyche is the most valuable thing for me, although I know that my years keep passing.* (Sandugash, 42 y.o. woman, divorced, higher education, 1 child aged 11 years)

*I do not want to start a new family. It will be difficult for my child to live in this new family. I have girlfriends who are single parents as well, they work and earn money. They never say they are single; the children are the most precious thing they have. Therefore, they do not want to marry.* (Manshuk, 35 y.o. woman, divorced, higher education, 1 child aged 9 years)

As a result of permanent self-restraint, single mothers may experience psychological problems. Our research demonstrated that many single mothers shared their negative experiences and unfavourable emotional state.

*My daughter once asked me, 'Mom, why are you always sad?'* (Yulia, 42 y.o. woman, divorced, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 9 years)

*The most powerful deterrent is fear, not money, not time. Fear in general. I used to live with the feeling that I am living a bad life. And I'm scared if it becomes good. Sometimes it seems better to leave it intact. I understand that much is imposed on me by my parents, I absorb everything from society as a sponge; my own wrong judgments impose much on me. Fear needs to be analysed and interrupted.* (Moldir, 38 y.o. woman, divorced, higher education, 2 children aged 14 and 8 years)

*Mental health is of primary importance, everything stems from there; it has already been proven. I need to have a sober and clear perception of the surrounding world. Presently, there is some uncertainty and indecision in this regard. I am good, not excellent, as regards health. I am affected by problems and feelings from the outside world, the reality affects me. I realised that I needed to have a person close to me, with whom I would be able to feel good and comfortable. Everyone must have such a person. Then you will be a fully functioning person and in this case you will have even more energy and a stimulus to move forward.* (Mariya, 35 y.o. woman, divorced, higher education, 1 child aged 6 years)

There are no gender differences in the emotional well-being of single parents: our research findings show that single fathers also experience emotional and psychological problems.

*The worst thing is the loneliness – that is the main problem. It's very hard to stay at home alone. Your interlocutor is either a TV set or a cat. Loneliness is reflected in the human psyche. I turn on the TV set and I take my mind off.* (Elmir, 52 y.o. man, divorced, secondary vocational education, two children aged 15 and 10 years)

*My heart aches when I think about my life. So, men die of heart diseases. Doctors told me to worry less. If you worry much, you will not live long.* (Beken, 56 y.o. man, divorced, secondary vocational education, 2 children aged 11 and 8 years)

Our research clearly shows that informal social ties are an important survival tool for single mothers and fathers, whereas in Kazakhstan state support is granted only to low-income families – be it a single parent or a family with two parents (Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Social Protection of Population, 2016). Many of our study participants said they were not socially protected, single parents were not needed by society; there were no benefits, no compensation, and no state aid, “*no social support, which could make you feel that you are a citizen of this society and that the state supports you*” (Mariyash, 47 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, one child aged 6 years). Aid comes from relatives, relatives of single parents help them financially; it is expressed in grant aid and assistance (money, clothes and products). In addition to material support, relatives promote children’s socialisation and upbringing.

*In financial terms, my parents and my brother help me; they also provide food (meat and fish). In addition, they provide moral support: they call and talk to me.* (Dina, 35 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 7 years)

*My relatives help me. My son goes to my older sister and stays with her mostly during summer. She brings him up and she has four adult sons. They explain somethings to my son, they teach him.* (Aziza, 38 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 11 years)

*I have a brother and five sisters in my village; they have adult children, they help us. For example, they send us money and bring clothes by the first of September. I never had any difficulty in this regard. I never worried that my son did not have clothes or a notebook, my relatives have always brought me these things.* (Sarah, 42 y.o. woman, widowed, higher education, 1 child aged 10 years)

*It’s good that we live together with my sister and my parents and raise the children together. For example, I have a friend, his wife left him. He has to raise his children alone. His relatives are in another city; thus, he is almost alone in our city. He does not have enough time to communicate with his children because of work. It is difficult for single parents to combine work and child raising without any kind of support from relatives.* (Yerlan, 52 y.o. man, divorced, secondary vocational education, 2 children aged 15 and 10 years)

Single mothers and fathers with low education levels (those who did not receive professional education), usually do not have a stable job; they only

have temporary or casual earnings. Quite often, such employment is not registered by way of an employment contract, which leads to the infringement of single parents' rights.

*Now it's more difficult to find a job, people ask to do repairs less often. Accordingly, this has an impact both on me and on my work. It costs me. I have to look for different part-time work.* (Alexandr, 41 y.o. man, widowed, general secondary education, 1 child aged 12 years)

*Single parents always think about their children, especially when they are unemployed. They think how to find money for food and clothes, and how to give their children money for school. Therefore, you get involved in any gigs in order to get money.* (Irina, 42 y.o. woman, divorced, general secondary education, 2 children aged 15 and 10 years)

*You think permanently about where to get some money, how to find additional earnings; you start saving money.* (Moldir, 38 y.o. woman, divorced, higher education, 2 children aged 14 and 8 years)

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The study revealed that Kazakh women who were trained during the Soviet era and who did not know Russian at that time did not receive the desired special education. Training in secondary special and higher educational institutions was mostly conducted in Russian. Accordingly, ignorance of the Russian language ensures limited access to special education. Presently, these women are in a more difficult situation because they are forced to find unskilled or low-skilled jobs with relevantly low salaries. Their desire to ensure a decent life for themselves and for their children makes them work more. In other words, in addition to their main work, women try to earn extra money.

*I wanted to become a doctor; I studied at a medical school, but I had to drop out because I did not speak Russian. It was difficult to learn due to ignorance of the Russian language.* (Rymkesh, 47 y.o. woman, divorced, general secondary education, 2 children aged 16 and 10 years)

*In my youth I did not speak Russian well. Because of this, I could not study at the institute, so I did not get a higher education, and I could not obtain a good job without it. Therefore, I work just about anywhere.* (Gulbakhram, 42 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 14 years)

At the same time, respondents nostalgically remembered life in the USSR and noted positive aspects in terms of social support for the population of the disintegrated country.

*In Soviet times, we knew the days on which we would have a salary, vacation days; we knew that we would go somewhere to have a rest once a year. And now one can't plan anything; you do not even know whether you will work today or not. Job cuts and dismissals are common everywhere.* (Yaroslav, 55 y.o. man, divorced, secondary vocational education, 4 children aged 15, 12, 10 and 7 years)

*Previously, in Soviet times, everything was free of charge. The Palace of Pioneers, sports, various clubs were free. Now we have to pay for everything.* (Rymkesh, 47 y.o. woman, divorced, general secondary education, 2 children aged 16 and 10 years)

Although the participants in our study (single mothers) noted they did not face any negative social attitude toward themselves (by their colleagues and/or at their places of residence), most generally indicated that single mothers are subject to public condemnation.

*We say: you are a woman, you gave birth and you have to cope with all the related problems and worries. That is, increased demands are placed on women. This is typical for us – Muslims.* (Gulbakhram, 42 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 14 years)

*It is very difficult to keep the family together; at the very beginning everything is nice, romantic and beautiful. And then, when problems arise, every woman suffers more than a man. We remain with children. Who should be blamed for this in our society? The woman should be blamed. We become 'second-hand' people – women who raise their children without husbands. They call us promiscuous women because we have no husbands. We just live in such a society.* (Mariyash, 47 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 6 years)

A single mother is more susceptible to condemnation in close relationships. Moreover, such a woman becomes the object of accusations and attacks not only in her close relationships but also in close relationships with her former husband, her partner. Often, close relatives of the man protect him, blaming only his female partner. All of this leads to stress, to ill-considered actions (suicide attempts, abortions, self-mutilation), which ultimately worsens women's health.

*Dad said, 'If she comes here, her daughter should be sent to an orphanage'. When I told my mother about my pregnancy, she was offended. Mom said that if she had known about it earlier, I would have had an abortion. (Aydana, 19 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 1 year)*

*Mom agreed, Dad does not agree. My father is strict and cruel. He said that I could enter the house without my child and that I had to leave the child. (Zhazira, 20 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 7 months)*

*We started dating 3 years ago and in the last (third) year I became pregnant. When I told him that I was pregnant, he did not believe me and did not want to date any longer. His brothers accused me of getting pregnant on purpose in order to make him marry me. His relatives asked another girl for marriage and he married her. (Tomiris, 22 y.o. woman, single, incomplete higher education, 1 child aged 1 year)*

*His parents became aware of my pregnancy and his mother died from the pressure of that. Therefore, his sister blames me for this. She calls me on the telephone even today saying that she will punish me and hand me over to the police. (Maya, 18 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 5 months)*

Women who raise their children alone instil social norms in them. At the same time, they realise that their children lack paternal upbringing, and this is something they cannot provide.

*My child needs his father's attention. When I think about it, it makes me feel bad. Sometimes my son sits and looks at children with fathers, and I understand that he is missing his father. (Gafura, 42 y.o. woman, single, general secondary education, 1 child aged 12 years)*

*I solve problems related to child raising by myself. I always tell him to be educated and intelligent. However, I do not know, maybe his father could have risen the child in a different way. I ensure the education, which I know. I always tell him not to do anything bad to anyone, to study diligently, not to fight with other boys. I do not know what kind of other education should be ensured. (Arai, 35 y.o. woman, single, secondary vocational education, 1 child aged 9 years)*

In general, when speaking about this study's findings on lifestyles in single-parent families in the context of the transition to a market economy it is possible to single out a number of general and specific reasons for the emergence of this family type. General reasons include divorces, the unwillingness of partners to start a family, and planned pregnancies for the purpose of giving birth to children outside of marriage. Specific reasons include unofficial marriages that are entered into solely as part of a religious rite. This phenomenon is typical for Kazakhstan.

The search for survival strategies in single-parent families is determined by the need to resolve specific problems in each family. The latter include financial problems that may lead to poverty as well as to the related need for some social security and assistance; legal problems, including the establishment of paternity, legal custody of children, obtaining support for the child; child-raising problems, housing, medical care and employment.

Studies consistently demonstrate that single mothers are in a relatively unfavourable economic situation, which is aggravated in social terms by the current economic in Kazakhstan. Extended families and informal social ties are the most important source of economic, emotional and psychological support for this type of family in Kazakhstan.

## **Discussion**

Like in many other countries, one can observe an increase in the number of single parents in Kazakhstan. This adds to research interest in this type of family.

Studies carried out in different Central Asian republics testify to the negative impact of transformation on the life satisfaction of the population in these countries (Abbott, 2002; Abbott et al., 2011; Cockerham et al., 2004; Nazpary, 2002; Namazie and Sanfey, 2001; Abbott and Wallace, 2009). At the same time, the situation in Kazakhstan is slightly better than in other Central Asian countries and in some post-Soviet countries of the Caucasus (Abbott et al., 2011; Richardson et al., 2008). The collapse of the Soviet Union brought various changes and consequences, not only in the political, economic and social spheres of independent Kazakhstan but also in marriage and family relations (Agadjanian, 1999; Abdyrayymova et al., 2015).

Various think tanks and research centres involved in post-Soviet studies (including Central Asia) have been established in different countries around the world. However, there is still little knowledge and first-hand information regarding various life aspects of the population in this region. The socio-economic status of single parents in Central Asia is one of these little-studied aspects.

One should consider historical features of the local realities and the



unique character of modern processes, for example, post-Soviet class formation. In this region, people have almost no experience in social movements for equal rights, group women's solidarity, and public discussions on sensitive matters. This is shown even in the absence of suitable words for describing the studied phenomenon. In the commonly used vocabulary of the Russian language, only two terms are widely used to describe a wide range of women's possible statuses related to their romantic relations: 'married' and 'single'. Finnish sociologist Anna Rotkirch (2017) explains this vocabulary deficit by noting that during the Western sexual revolution the USSR was a state governed by elderly men who were ignorant of youth problems and constrained global transformation processes.

Since the 1970s, a new way of dealing with something personal has been formed in the West, parallel to the spread of extramarital relationships (Peterson et al., 2002). Similar changes occurred later in Soviet society. However, there was a ban on the public mention of anything related to intimacy up to "*perestroika*" ("restructuring"). Therefore, there were no conditions predetermining the occurrence of specific terms describing new practices in the region.

Each era corresponds to specific private life models recognised as correct and desirable. Thus, for example, George Murdock in "Social Structure" published in 1949 examined the evolution of family relations. Family was considered as a universal social grouping based on common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. At the heart of every family – the nucleus – were a man and a woman and their child or children. However, according to Murdock, a family has nothing to do with an elderly couple without children, a homosexual union, an arranged marriage, cohabitation, one parent with a child and many other modern forms of private life – everything evident in Central Asian societies in the context of their transformation.

One can observe quite a multifaceted picture: according to social practices, close people, relatives who have died are still regarded as family members. Some people include distant relatives, neighbours, friends and colleagues who are associated with love and care. Sometimes, even family pets are regarded as family members.

Presently, a family is a form of relationship based on care regardless of the presence of children, blood relationship, marriage, sexual relations, gender, age and the number of partners (Smart, 2011).

Various forms of romantic and non-romantic cohabitation as well as their rapid spread reveal that satisfying relationships matter today much more than any recognised institutions. This seems to be typical of post-modern society.

The collapse of the former social system led to the fact that in the 1990s many men became jobless and women assumed the role of primary

breadwinners. Therefore, working women obtained financial independence parallel to a double workload. Keeping in mind the full working week, the upbringing of children and organisation of everyday life are still considered women's responsibility. Hence, the additional burden leads to deprivation; not everyone is ready to tolerate this.

Various studies consistently demonstrate that single mothers are more disadvantaged than married women (Amato, 2000; McLanahan and Percheski, 2008); this is clearly manifested in economic stress (Lino, 1994; Smock et al., 1999; Sawhill et al., 2010). This trend is seen in this research, although the situation is exacerbated by the impact of the economic crisis, shown in Kazakhstan in the form of depreciation of the national currency (*tenge*), which has meant higher prices for goods and services.

Malin Jordal, Kumudu Wijewardena and Pia Olsson (2013) noted the understanding of the responsibility and conscious self-limitation of women. Women's self-sacrifice for the welfare of their children is also confirmed by our research findings: single mothers view their own future in terms of being close to their children; these women are tied to their children, they focus on child raising and providing material support; they also wish to take care of their grandchildren.

As a result of permanent self-restraint, single mothers are experiencing psychological problems. Researchers also refer to the relatively low levels of physical and emotional well-being of unmarried mothers (Demo and Acock, 1996; Meadows et al., 2008). Lorraine Davies, William R. Avison and Donna D. McAlpine (1997) emphasises that single mothers are almost three times more likely to experience major depressive disorders than married mothers. Higher stress can be a chronic problem for poor single mothers (Booth and Amato, 1991). This research confirms the above findings.

The differences observed in the well-being of single mothers living in different countries indicate the role of state policy in supporting single-parent families. In this regard, the Scandinavian countries pursue more proactive policies (Wong et al, 1993; Aassve et al., 2007). In Asian countries, state policies on single parents vary. Wei-Jun Jean Yeung and Hyunjoon Park (2016) note that state assistance to single parents is usually limited in Asia and extended families can play a more important role in the life of single parents and their children in some Asian countries than in Western societies. Our research also shows that informal social ties are an important survival tool for single mothers and fathers in Kazakhstan.

In the United States, despite successful ongoing social security reforms, single mothers, especially those with lower education levels and fewer skills, continue to experience unsustainable employment, low wages and high levels of poverty (Peterson et al., 2002; Blank, 2002). Our research findings also affirm this fact.

Summing up the discussion, one may argue that modern men and women are experimenting with life scenarios. But the state continues to consider the nuclear 'social cell' as a natural and desirable family type. As a result, there is a gap between those who benefit from direct state support and those who often do not need it (nuclear families); at the same time, single parents are often ignored. This is especially painful keeping in mind the current deinstitutionalisation of the family sphere when, on one hand, the number of marriages is dropping, and the number of divorces is growing. In our case, these indicators were determined by the elimination of strict state control over the private sphere and relevant difficulties during the transformation period.

## **Conclusion**

The findings reported in this article are consistent with the findings of previous studies showing that single parents are in a relatively disadvantaged situation compared to families with two parents.

The most obvious problems facing single-parent families include financial problems that can lead to poverty and the need for social security assistance; legal problems, including the establishment of paternity, cases involving the custody of children, obtaining child care financial assistance. In addition, these problems include taking care of children, housing, medical care and employment.

Stress caused by economic difficulties can aggravate disagreements over finances and leave the spouses tense and irritable. These considerations suggest that low socioeconomic status increases the risk of divorce, reducing all the benefits received from marriage (Amato, 2000). This explains the rise in divorces over the last decade.

The transition from a socialist economy to a modern market-oriented one led to the emergence of both successful entrepreneurs and people suffering a difficult material situation. This situation is particularly difficult for single mothers and fathers without a professional education, permanent work and low incomes. There was no specific policy for single parents in the Soviet Union, although these people were supported through guaranteed full employment (non-working citizens were prosecuted for parasitism) and universal care for children (free kindergartens, school, additional education, sports sections and vocational education). With the collapse of that state, all former guarantees were replaced by the dominance of the free market; the vulnerability of single parents increased significantly (Klugman and Motivans, 2001).

This topic requires further research with a view to determining the scope of the above patterns. It is of interest to study quantitative data, in particular

demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, which distinguish family types with a single parent from each other and between families with two parents.

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