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Abstract: *In this case, families of single mothers are called "incomplete" or "maternal", and "under the very common term "incomplete family" is understood the family of a parent who, due to various reasons, single-handedly raises and bears responsibility for a child living in his or her care. At present, the spectrum of incomplete families is replenished, in addition to those mentioned above, by families of spouses who actually live separately, due to the practice of adoption of a child by a single woman, as well as the establishment of guardianship or trusteeship in the case of orphanhood." It is important that as a unit of observation it is proposed to consider not only parents with children living separately from other relatives, but also single-parent households, which are understood as "a socio-economic unit that unites people through relationships that arise when organizing their shared life: running a common household, living together."*

Keywords: *single mothers, women and men, children and parents, single mother.*

As a result of demographic changes in marital and reproductive behavior of the population, single parenthood is becoming more common, which reflects the global trend of increasing numbers of women and men forced to raise children alone. At the same time, families of single mothers are called "incomplete" or "maternal", and "the very common term "incomplete family" is understood as the family of a parent who, due to various reasons, single-handedly raises and bears responsibility for a child living in his or her care. At present, the spectrum of incomplete families is replenished, in addition to those mentioned above, by families of spouses who actually live separately, due to the practice of adoption of a child by a single woman, as well as the establishment of guardianship or

trusteeship in the event of orphanhood." According to researchers E. R. Yarskaya-Smirnova and P. V. Romanov, it is necessary to consider "single or solo mothers in a broad context, including women raising their children without a spouse", while "both research and the practice of targeted social protection of the most vulnerable groups of the population should take into account not only the legal status of women as unregistered, widowed, married or divorced, but the real status, resources and survival strategies of single mothers". It is important that as a unit of observation it is proposed to consider not only parents with children living separately from other relatives, but also single-parent households, which are understood as "a socio-economic unit that unites people through relationships that arise when organizing their shared life: running a common household, living together". At the same time, single mothers, living in the same house with their husbands after divorce, their parents or parents-in-law, accumulate economic and other resources, responsibility for the care and upbringing of children, freeing up time for study or work, while parents with children without family support and social assistance find themselves in a more difficult situation [1,2,3,4]. The second source of replenishment of the number of mothers' families is extramarital births. In the last 15 years, there has been a steady increase in the level of extramarital births and registration of children by a single mother. In 2000, about 9 thousand (28.4% of the total number of newborns) children were born out of wedlock. In 2005, 10,999 children were born out of wedlock (27.88% of all births), of which 6,073 children were registered by joint application of the parents, and 4,926 children by application of the mother alone. In 2005, there was an increase in the number of children registered by mothers alone (by 220 births) compared to 2004. Thus, in general, out-of-wedlock births in St. Petersburg in 1990 constituted 15%, in 1995 - 23%, in 1997-2000 - 28%. Moreover, out-of-wedlock births are most often observed among the youngest women (under 20 years old), including minors who have not reached social and economic maturity[5,6,7,8].

The share of family and maternity benefits in the total family income, their importance for supporting a family with children has significantly decreased. Natasha believes that the meager amount of the benefit and the small pension for

the loss of a breadwinner do not allow her to feed or clothe her child: "My child is 3.5 years old. And, naturally, the amount of the benefit is small, I would like it to be larger. I would be satisfied with at least three times more. Now it is 500 rubles. I also receive a pension for the loss of a breadwinner [9,10]. The pension is also minimal - 2000, but it is also calculated based on length of service, a person must have 25 years of service in order to have a normal pension, and how can a person who died at 25 have 25 years of service." According to Anna, the transfer of child benefits to cards in St. Petersburg reduces the ability of mothers to buy the things necessary for their child at lower prices: "The problem is that child benefits are now on the card, and are not issued in cash. For me, this is a problem because children's stores do not always have what I need." Many women face difficulties in receiving benefits and alimony due to the lack of the necessary documents, as well as the unwillingness of fathers to participate in raising a child. I. E. Kalabikhina showed that the existing "inertia of the distribution of family roles, characteristic of Soviet times, when, despite high employment, women were almost entirely responsible for raising children, continues to shape the relationship between fathers and children today"[11,12,13,14]. In the case of Nadezhda, the woman cannot receive either alimony or child support because her ex-husband became unemployed: "I have not received cash benefits because our ex-dad does not work, and I cannot provide documents to the social security office about what salary my dad receives, because he does not receive anything at all, and there is no alimony either." Thus, at present, many fathers are practically freed from responsibility for the financial support and upbringing of children, and the state has distanced itself from fulfilling its obligations towards women and children. In accordance with the "Main Directions of the State Family Policy", it was envisaged "further development of the family benefit system, covering support for all families with children; gradual increase in the share of expenditure on family benefits, including maternity benefits and childcare benefits up to one and a half years of age in the gross domestic product to 2.2 percent." In reality, the ratio of expenditure on family and maternity benefits to the gross domestic product GDP decreased from 0.98% in 1996 to less than 0.3% in 2004[15,16,17].

According to E. R. Yarskaya-Smirnova and P. V. Romanov, "targeted assistance, although it is intended to increase the effectiveness of social security, so far has a negative impact on the most vulnerable segments of the population, primarily women," since it is necessary "to prove their right to receive a benefit guaranteed by the state, the meager amount of which... does not change their situation at all." For example, Alexandra said that women have to re-register the benefit every year, collecting numerous certificates to prove their "need": "I am currently applying for child benefits, I do not understand why I have to re-register them a thousand times. We received them until January, then they took them away from us: "Go and re-register the documents", and for me it took so much time, nerves and tears. Today I went, went to six places and did nothing." Summing up the interim results, it is important to note that compensation and child benefits do not save families and children from the dire situation, and it can be quite difficult to receive them. According to research by V. V. Elizarov, head of the Center for the Study of Population Problems at the Economics Department of Moscow State University, "in recent years, the level of real assistance to families has fallen sharply[18,19,20]. More and more, families are forced to rely only on their own resources. The size of the monthly child benefit has increased only 1.32 times since 1996. At the same time, the subsistence minimum for children has increased 5 times. As a result, the share of the child's subsistence minimum covered by the monthly benefit decreased by 4 times and amounted to less than 3% in the 4th quarter of 2004. The benefit for child care up to 1.5 years, despite the nominal growth in 2002, amounted to only about 7% of the average salary in 2004, while in 1996 it was 19.2%. Accordingly, the contribution of these benefits to family income and their importance for supporting families with children decreased[21,22,23,24].

Our study confirmed the findings. According to the participants of the study, the main reason for the deterioration of children's health is the decline in the quality of medical care for the population, the cost and inaccessibility of services in the children's health care system. Children, just like adults, find it difficult to receive timely and quality medical care. Even just getting an

appointment with a doctor becomes a problem: queues, numbers, an appointment several days in advance, indifference of medical personnel. Therefore, the respondents simply do not go to the doctor and try to treat their children themselves, using folk remedies: “We need to pay attention to our health care. Specifically, to medical assistance for children. At the moment, I think there is none, I work in adult health care and there is none in adult health care either, I mean free. And children have the same problem. I haven't been there with my children for a long time[25,26,27]. My child has a sore throat, but they won't take a blood test or smears! It all depends on funding. This is all the money that for some reason the government does not have for its children.” The consequence of material poverty is the lack of prospects for solving the housing problem[28,29,30,31]. Many single mothers are chronically late in solving urgent household problems. There are no funds to repair the apartment, furniture, household appliances, it is impossible to create a normal environment for the full-fledged upbringing of a child. To a greater extent, the situation of permanent poverty concerns mothers without family support. For example, Nadezhda lives alone with a child in a communal apartment: “My problem, but it also concerns the financial side, since I live in a communal apartment, my neighbors are drinkers, our gas water heater broke down, i.e. we were left without hot water, who will help me in this situation? No one! And I do not have the strength and opportunity to somehow repair it myself and with my own money or buy a new one, I can't expect help from neighbors, and from the state ... I also do not hope for any help.” In solving their material and housing problems, the study participants see the dominant role of the state[32,33,34]. Many women do not have enough strength and resources to cope with problems on their own. According to many, the key to solving material difficulties is a decent living wage. Thus, Angelina is dissatisfied with the level of wages, which cannot meet the needs of either an adult or a small child: "I would not really need to beg the state for any child benefit if the state thought about what wages it pays[35,36,37,38]. If it sets the subsistence minimum at 3,000, why does it pay a single mother 3,000-4,000, that's hers and not her child's? Where should she get it if she works a full

day and gets 4,000 for it, how can she live on? If the state set a decent wage, then I would not need anyone's help, I would cope on my own, somehow I would solve my problems." Mothers' evaluative judgments regarding the existing system of social support for maternal families indicate that women as consumers of social services are becoming dependent on social services, institutions, organizations, municipalities providing humanitarian, financial and social assistance, or, on the contrary, avoid becoming their clients[39,40,41,42]. The results of the study show that there are two polar positions of mothers regarding the receipt of social assistance, which we have conventionally called dependent and autonomous. For example, Nadezhda is sure that public organizations, municipalities and the department of social protection of the population are obliged to provide assistance: "I know that public organizations, funds and social security should also provide financial assistance once every three months, i.e. help with clothes if you do not have money for clothes..., food and everything so that everything is normal." Other respondents do not have a formed attitude towards receiving constant assistance from social institutions[43,44]. Moreover, some women perceive the fact of applying for social assistance as extremely painful and interpret it as a humiliating necessity, which ultimately leads to the fact that the family and children do not receive the required assistance. Thus, Katya, even in critical situations, prefers to endure, to "get by," but not to ask for help: "I have never turned to anyone in my life, in my child's life, I have never received anything, no help, because, firstly, I am poorly informed on this issue, and secondly, I understand that, by and large, no one needs us, and so going to beg to get what you are entitled to is so unpleasant that you don't even want to go and ask for anything again[45].

In the work of social specialists, it is necessary to make wider use of technologies for educating and informing the population, social advertising, and forming public opinion on supporting single-parent families. Parents need employment, self-organization and unification of families to solve common life problems, training in necessary social skills and ways to get out of difficult situations, legal and psychological counseling. The identified problems and needs

give grounds to talk about the need to pay special attention to innovative technologies for activating client resources, methods of activating the local community, methods and forms of unification of families with similar problems[46].

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