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SYSTEM OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR SINGLE MOTHERS IN POLAND

Abstract

Lone parenthood is not a new phenomenon but this problem touches growing group of people and is therefore more often chosen as the subject of research in the field of pedagogy, psychology, sociology and social work. In accordance to the reorganization in Poland in the 1980s, many social problems have been highlighted due to demographic, socio-economic in the labor market in Poland but also in Western Europe. In Poland since the 1990s the government changed its approach to its citizens, from the welfare state to a state which aims in the active social policy. The activities of this type of social policy refers to the ideas of social economy, the need to increase employment opportunities for vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities) and persons who, for various reasons, are inactive (e.g. single mothers with children or the elderly). This concept is not new, it's development started in Europe in the 1990s of twentieth century and is based, on the transformation of the welfare state into the decentralized and auxiliary state, that stimulate the development of social entrepreneurship and active citizenship with maintaining the principle of social solidarity in the face of the need to redefine social issues. One of the groups of clients of the social welfare system are single mothers who can count on financial, legal and social support from the social institutions. However, there are sometimes single women who are not entitled to these benefits. The paper discusses and analyses the legal and social problems of single women.

Key words: single mothers, social services, the legal system, social system, single motherhood by choice, portraits of single motherhood

Introduction

Single parenthood is not a new phenomenon, but the number of people this problem relates to is growing and hence, it is an increasingly more frequent topic of research in pedagogy, psychology, sociology and social work. Due to the country's reorganisation in the 1980s, a lot of social problems became more visible. It was caused by demographic changes, the socio-economic situation on the labour market in Poland and the whole Western Europe (Lubińska-Bogacka, Zawisza 2014; Lubińska-Bogacka 2015).

In view of law regulations and social sciences, a single mother is: an unmarried woman, a widow, a divorced woman, a woman after separation pronounced by court, or a married woman if her husband's parental rights have been terminated or he is imprisoned. Such

a person brings up one or more children. In Poland as many as 20% of children are raised by single mothers and this trend does not seem to be able to stop. On the contrary, there are many signs that the number of single parent families in Poland will increase, as the number of divorces keeps growing and at the same time, the phenomenon of single parenthood is no longer associated with social negation (Zawisza 2013).

In Poland the state's attitude towards its citizens has changed since the 1990s. A welfare state has turned into one with active social policy (The active social policy is the conception of policy orientated on social support and social services. This concept stresses the integration of public social services and services of employment. The individualization of services of social re-integration is a value of this approach with the simultaneous encouraging to the activation of the whole local communities). Such actions within social policy summon ideas of social economy, the necessity to enhance opportunities of disadvantaged employed groups (e.g. the disabled) and those who are, for various reasons, economically inactive (e.g. women, single mothers with children or elderly people). This concept has been developing in Europe since as far as the 1990s and it involves transformation of welfare state into a decentralised and subsidiary state that stimulates the growth of social entrepreneurship and active citizenship while preserving the idea of social solidarity in face of the need to redefine social issues. These issues are addressed by Rymśa (2008) and Karwacki with Kaszyński (2008), among others. Transformation of Polish social policy goes in the direction of strengthening citizens' position. A lot of activating tasks have been transferred to a broadly understood social welfare system and its employees are in charge of preparing individuals to take over the responsibility for their lives. The support received by social welfare's beneficiaries serves the purpose of helping them to overcome difficult situations, which they cannot do on their own. The main purpose is to make social assistance beneficiaries independent and integrated with the society. The state's assistance is designed to be temporary and make individuals active as fast as possible, which will help them work on achieving independence and eventually become self-sufficient (Sierpowska 2011). Social welfare is the last line of support in the system of social security. It should be noted that Poland cannot be compared with other European Union states, where social assistance for families, in particular those with small children, is very measurable (it pertains to financial, health and housing benefits, social insurance and school fees refunds). Even though these benefits were drastically reduced in the European Union in the 1990s, they are still sufficient, because a single mother can without much problem raise her children. Due to the fact that the level of assistance is good, some appeal for its further reductions, as a lot of research indicates that women become too dependent on social welfare benefits (Murray 2001). This problem is also monitored in Polish assistance system. What is more, it is even assumed that social and material help that mothers receive makes them less motivated to take over the responsibility for their children's fate, to be self-sufficient and to act independently (e.g. to claim child support from the child's father or to legalise their relationships).

Research methodology

Due to the fact that single mothers are a social group showing tendencies of dynamic growth, the author decided to study, or analyse – to be more precise, the problems and opportunities of single women who are beneficiaries of social service's institutional support system. This study is aimed at showing the system of social support for single mothers implemented in Poland. It analyses institutional assistance system offered to single mothers, and describes financial, legal and social aspects of this system.

The main problem was the question of how the system of social welfare works for mothers who need it and which single mothers need such help. Due to the fact that the article was mainly based on collecting national statistical data (data from Central Statistical Office, reports from surveys for the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy) and on the analysis of documents collected in year 2016 from Centres for single women in Cracow, Centres for victims of violence and a Crisis Intervention Centre, as well as on the author's own observations and interviews with single women (48 mothers) and social workers (4 workers), normative methods were used for this type of research, as this group of methods was more adequate to the analysed problems. It is a group of methods that is characteristic of research approach called structuralism (a trend in modern humanistic studies postulating the analysis of the studied phenomena's structures and systems, not their genesis and function). These methods allow to analyse a social group and institutions that have an influence on psychosocial functions of individuals and social groups that are of interest to us. They also allow to predict the development of various social phenomena. The sources of these research methods are found in historical and ethnographic studies as well as in sociology. The mentioned fields of study use the described research method in order to describe a specific segment of cultural and social reality of individuals, groups or the whole social system (Cohen, Manion 1998).

Demographic and social characteristics of single mothers

In case of family issues, especially of single parent families and their demographic and social characteristics, their living conditions and activities in different areas, we only have scattered or fragmentary data that are not always up-to-date (we are short of regular publications that would focus solely on the topic and statistics of families, including single mother families as well as the conditions and quality of their lives). Sometimes different studies present inconsistent data (Topińska 2012). According to data published in *Central Statistical Office's Demographic Yearbook* in 2015 on p. 218, in 2014 in Poland there were 2,503 thousand single parent families, including almost 1,288 thousand with children under 24 to support, which constitutes 30.8% of the total number of families with children and 23.6% of the number of families with children under 24 to support, for comparison (in 2002 the numbers were 25.4% and 18.5%, respectively). Single parents raised 20% of children under 24 to support (1,814 thousand). We can talk about

feminisation of single parent families, as mothers with children represent 89% of them (in 2011 there were 1,144 thousand single mothers and 144 thousand single fathers). The causes of single parenthood are indirectly indicated by the structure of single mothers: 39% of them are married women whose husbands have not stayed in the household for at least 3 months; 28% are divorcees, 23% are unmarried and 9,5% are widows. In cities there were more divorced women (32%) than in urban areas.

In 2011 there were 264 thousand unmarried women and 24 thousand unmarried men raising children alone, and for comparison (in 2002 there were respectively 178 thousand and 7.4 thousand of them). This increase, in case of men in particular, may be related to the fact that they more often remain in informal relationships that are at a greater risk of falling apart. As far as provinces are concerned, the lowest rate of single parent families was reported in Podkarpackie Province (20%), and the biggest rate in Dolnośląskie and Zachodniopomorskie Provinces (28% and 27%). Furthermore, the number of divorces increased significantly (from 42 thousand in 2000 to 66 thousand in 2014) as well as the number of children born outside formal relationships (from 45 thousand in 2000 to 90 thousand in 2014). The results of the latest census indicate an increase in the number of single parent families and civil partnerships with children under 24 to support (in 2011 it was 1,288 thousand and 152 thousand respectively). Single parents raised 20% of children in this group (1,814 thousand) and partners raised 3% of children (more than 239 thousand). In more than 75% of cases, single mothers were aged between 25 and 49. More than 50% of single mothers completed at least secondary education finished with maturity exam (around 13% – higher education), 24% – vocational education.

The situation of a family household is influenced both by macro level factors (related to economy and labour market) and micro factors (related to lifestyle, including consumption style) of the given family. Thus, the living conditions of families are determined with the level and stability of income, the possibility of using goods that were either previously collected or inherited, the method of using them, the ability to fulfil one's own needs within the household, excluding purchasing them in free market. A very important factor of family situation is the housing condition, which can be described as relatively good in an average single parent family. Although statistically, single parent families have flats with the smallest usable area (in 2010 it was 58.33 m²; for full families with two children – over 89 m²), yet calculated per person, it is a quite high standard – 22.7 m² in 2010 (comparable with married couples with one child – 23.2 m²). The bigger the family, the smaller the area per person. Technical conditions and household effects are a separate issue. According to Central Statistical Office data, the household budgets in 2011 indicate that technical and sanitary appliances and installations in single family households are worse in case of every parameter analysed (water pipe, canalisation, flushed toilet, bathroom, running water etc.) than those of other family types, including multi-children families. Also, the households of single families with children are equipped with durable goods (a computer, a TV, a car, a freezer, etc.) on a worse level than those of other family types.

It has to be said that single mothers constitute the category of families that often inhabit collective households. According to the data of National Census of 2002, the number of single mothers with children living in such households was 1.8 thousand. They constituted 24% of the whole number of families with children living in collective households (like in 1978 it was the second largest group of families with children living in collective households; in 1978 single mother families constituted 10% of inhabitants of such households). Single mothers most often resided in centres for pregnant women or for women with small children (540 families – the largest category of families in this type of households) and residences for workers (510 families). Centres for the homeless (shelters, flophouses) were inhabited by 300 single mother families. 240 single women with children lived in student hostels. The smallest number (90) of single mother families with children inhabited care centres for the elderly. Almost 2.900 children of single mothers lived in collective households, almost half of this number lived in care centres for pregnant women or for women with small children. Due to various difficult psychosocial situations (mainly involving unemployment, indebtedness and insolvency) a growing number of women are becoming homeless and look for centres where they could raise their children. This type of institution is often inhabited by families with more than one child – the average number of children in a family is 1.9, while it is 1.0 in the total number of families living in collective households (the average number of children under 24 in single mother families is 1.48). Data on the basis of: *Budżety gospodarstw domowych w 2010 r.* (GUS 2011), and data collected from conversations in institutions.

Activity of single mothers in the labour market

A professional job provides a family with stable income, rooting in social structure and independent functioning of a household. Potentially, a lot of single parents in Poland, in particular women, have a chance of finding a job thanks to their relatively good education and the age of their children, who are already mostly independent (at least partially). It is worth mentioning that the structure of education of single mothers is better than the structure of education of the total number of women in Poland. Whereas more than a half of single mother families make a living by paid work, $\frac{1}{3}$ lives on social benefits and every tenth family is supported by other people. The percentage of unemployed single mothers is relatively high: in 2002 it was 19% (i.e. every fifth single mother was out of work). According to the report prepared by Government Population Council the main source of income for single parent families – similar to other family types in Poland – is paid work. Income structure for this category of families is of special character: there is a relatively high proportion of social insurance benefits (family pensions, social assistance pensions), family assistance system (child support, family benefits including the bonus for single parenthood, social welfare benefits). Compared to other family types, the share of donations in their households is significant (together with child support they constituted 17% of income). Single parent families are a dominant group of child

support recipients. A general proportion of this family type in the total number of people receiving child support from Alimony Fund is 77%. Official data also show that in majority of cases single mother families had a very low material status, according to Alimony Fund they did not exceed the threshold of family benefits of PLN 50.

Single women's life situation

According to Central Statistical Office data of 2010, the share of spendings in disposable income in this family type is 99.8% (more than in case of full multi-children families), hence, everything that single parents with children have is spent on consumption (fulfilling basic living and educational needs). Therefore, 70% of single parents declare that they are not able to cover an unexpected cost of PLN 800 (an amount corresponding to poverty threshold in 2009; only full families with four and more children showed a bigger rate – 76%).

Financial stability depends upon the head of household being employed, yet, getting and maintaining a job is related to the issue of securing educational and care needs in the family. If this responsibility falls upon one adult only, it is very difficult. Hence, a lot of single mothers do not work or quickly lose their jobs.

Poverty of single parent families

Employment in public sector and high rates of unemployment can suggest a difficult material situation of single parent families with children. It is often indicated in source literature that due to their structure (one breadwinner only), single families are potentially at a risk of impoverishment. Research conducted after 1990 show that with the use of objective and subjective poverty indicators, single parents with children were another, after multi-children families, group at a risk of poverty or already suffering from poverty. Central Statistical Office's estimates for 2010 confirm that single parent families with children are prone to be poor. This situation is aggravating with every year. An increase of poverty of single mother families is reported with the use of all poverty measures. However, it should be said that child support benefit implemented in 2015 will have a significant influence of the well-being of individual families. The amount of the benefit is PLN 500 per child per month (colloquially: 500+), whereas the benefit is payable for a second child and next children in a family, irrespectively of the family's income. It is payable for a first child if the income per person does not exceed PLN 800 or if the income per person does not exceed PLN 1.200 and any child is disabled. The benefit of PLN 500 per child is payable to entitled persons (parents, guardians) until every child is 18. Child support benefit is payable to the child's parents, guardians and actual guardians.

Single parent families as recipients of assistance for poor and destitute families

Single parents show an increasing tendency of not being able to provide for their families, which often makes them forced to look for help from assistance institutions. It is proved by statistical data. According to social welfare statistics, single parent families constitute 31% of the total number of families receiving benefits. The majority are women with children (29% and 16% are women with two and more children). For comparison – married couples with children constitute 53% of recipients, whereas informal partnerships with children – around 5%. When we compare the share of single parent families in the total structure of families (about 20%), it is clear that they are overrepresented in social welfare. The analysis of income of single parent families – the beneficiaries of this system indicates that $\frac{1}{5}$ of them have an income of between PLN 477 and PLN 1,000, whereas single mothers with four or more children are the most impoverished (their situation is worse than this of fathers with four and more children). At the same time, single fathers show lack of income more often than single mothers (most often they are single fathers with one child – around 10% of them has no income).

The analysis of causes for which social assistance is granted shows that in case of 50% of single mother families with children it is poverty, whereas in case of 60% it is unemployment. In case of both causes, the proportion of single fathers is slightly lower. They point to unemployment as the cause of receiving benefits less frequently than single mothers, and what is interesting, the more children there are in a family, the lower the share of fathers giving this reason is (57% – 42%). The second cause is disability and long-lasting sickness in a family (from around 30% to 20%; the recipients are most often fathers and mothers with one child). The remaining causes are less than 10%. The analysis of causes for turning to assistance centres for help (e.g. homelessness, sickness, disability, addiction, pathology, leaving prison, debts) indicates that they are not significantly different from the structure of reasons reported in case of married couples with children (in this category poverty and unemployment are of similar percentage). An important, but also alarming information is that even single parent families with only one child have major difficulties that get worse if the child's or mother's disability or chronic disease come to play a part. It is also significant that government statistics do not show such a combination of deficits that pertain to families and could show and identify the connections between problems.

The amount of social welfare benefits received per year depends on the number of people in a family. In 2010, $\frac{1}{3}$ of single parent families received less than PLN 500 (similar to married couples without children and with one child). Family benefits are a separate issue. In 2010, the percentage of single parent families in the total number of families receiving benefits was 23% (single parent families are 15% of the total number of multi-children families and single parent families with a disabled child are 10% of this type of families). 52% entitled single parent families showed the lowest income. In the structure of bonuses, the percentage of benefits for single parenthood was around 4%

(in the amount of PLN 170; most of it was granted in relation to the death of the other parent), which means that those families are entitled to assistance for other reasons. It should be said that the percentage of family benefits in the income structure of single parent families is higher than in other types of families, but only slightly – around 1.7%.

Separation of single parents – women into different categories

In terms of social policy and welfare, women who are single mothers are differentiated according to the type of single motherhood. Each of the families where the head of family is a woman is characterised with a different living situation, including income (the amount and structure of budget), different demographic and social characteristics, but also different motivations and approaches in relation to receiving social assistance. A lot of research by different authors, some of them being (Środoń, Rymsza 2001; Ciciela, Raław-Markowska 2001; Lubińska-Bogacka 2011; Szukalski 2010) present sociological characteristics of single motherhood.

The aforementioned authors usually list single mothers by choice, single mothers by chance, unwanted single motherhood and not entirely single motherhood. Social welfare activities also distinguish those family types that have been struck with accumulated factors threatening proper functioning, single mothers with disabled children, single mothers with many children, single parent families with children affected by problem of addiction and teenage single mothers. In case of the last group, early motherhood verifies plans and life of young women. It delays or changes and sometimes impedes a young girl's integration to the labour market. Fulfilling social expectations ascribed to the role of a mother and employee at the same time requires a lot of determination on the part of those people (Szukalski 2010; Mikołajczyk-Lerman 2007). These characteristics do not include women who often use institutional forms of care and assistance and those are women – mothers who are victims of long-lasting physical, psychological, economic or sexual violence and suffer constant traumas. They are often rejected by their closest environment, lack understanding of the process of violence and the process of violence victims' functioning, victimising them.

Portraits of women who also use social welfare include women – mothers who are in penal institutions. They take advantage of the chance to raise their own children. This system is not perfect, but has to be mentioned nonetheless. What is more, women - mothers who remain in penal institutions are supposed to participate in correctional, therapeutic and educational programs. Women leaving penal institutions have a chance of taking advantage of preventive measures and post-penal, probational activities, e.g. help with finding a job, connecting families (mother with children), using supervised apartments.

We should not forget that the system of social welfare also includes women - mothers who feel socially marginalised, after various crises related to an illness (e.g. cancer), disability, depression, mourning related to the death of a child, suicide attempts, divorces,

being left by children and relatives. All of those cases, some of them situational, short, incidental, other long-lasting, highly traumatic and disturbing lead to the situation where such women left to their own become clients of different social institutions.

There is also a growing number of women, who, after losing their job or a divorce, live in chronic crises. They are women who cannot deal with their situation, they are inactive, helpless and lack motivation to change. These women are in danger of fixation if they are not supported by other people or institutions. They are very often found in assistance institutions. They tend to back out, reject responsibility (for themselves and their children), and hence, their social relations deteriorate. Such women can show neurotic reactions, behaviour disorders and personality disorders.

System of assistance for women in the Polish system of social welfare

Support system is a certain strength a person draws from the feeling of belonging to a network of relations. Some families are satisfied with support from other people, uplifting their spirits, being a source of models and a base to go to in need of assistance.

Other families will need financial, legal or psychological support. That is why social workers, psychologists, pedagogues, guardians and family court judges should have an individual approach to every single parent family. Every family expects a different scope of help, a different character of support, as well as different frequency of receiving such help. Hence, a proper diagnosis of the needs of single parent families should include their heterogeneity. Within the system of social welfare, single mothers can receive financial support, but not every woman is entitled to it. This benefit is payable only to the poorest mothers, whose income does not exceed PLN 504 *per capita*, or PLN 583 if they have a disabled child. The amount of family benefit is between PLN 48 and PLN 68, depending on the child's age. In case of children up to 5 years old, the amount is PLN 48, for children between 5 and 18 it is PLN 64, and for children between 18 and 21 it is PLN 68. If a woman becomes entitled for family benefit, she can apply for different bonuses:

- for giving birth to a baby – it should not be confused with the so-called “becikowe”. One can apply for this benefit amounting to PLN 1,000 before the baby turns one. The application should include abridged copy of the baby's birth certificate;
- for taking care of a child during child care leave – if a woman goes on child care leave and takes care of the child personally, she is entitled to a bonus of PLN 400 per month for the period of 2 years. She does not receive this money if she gets a paid job, receives maternity benefit, disability or retirement pension, or if her child goes to kindergarten, nursery or another institution;
- for the beginning of school year – a one-off benefit of PLN 100 payable if the child starts school or goes to reception class;

- if the school a child attends is away from their residence – if a schoolchild lives away from their home town the bonus is PLN 90 (paid from September to June), whereas if a schoolchild commutes to school it is PLN 50;
- support for single parents – if a child's father is dead or unknown and as a result no child support is paid to the mother, she can apply for single parent bonus in the amount of PLN 170 per month per child, yet not more than PLN 340 for all children. If a child is disabled, the benefit can be PLN 80 bigger.

If a child's father fails to pay child support, a mother can apply for alimony advance. Family benefit and the aforementioned bonuses are paid by communes. However, appropriate application and documents must be filed in advance. A woman must in such circumstances remember about documents she has to file in different institutions, e.g. in case of an application to establish the family benefit entitlement, she must include a copy of her ID card, a copy of the child's birth certificate, certificate of the child's disability (if applicable), certificate of the child's continuation of education after 18 years of age, income certificate from the Treasury Office, certificate of other incomes, other certificates, e.g. final decree of divorce, etc.

A woman can settle together with her child, if she is unmarried, widowed, divorced, separated, or if her husband's parental rights have been terminated or he is imprisoned. Settling with a child is more beneficial, as lower tax is deducted. Furthermore, if a mother is unemployed, raising a child up to 7 years old and the income *per capita* in the family does not exceed PLN 351, and she wants to undertake paid work, she can apply for the so-called refund of child care costs. Refund money is paid by the starosta (chief administrator of a Polish county). The money cannot be bigger than a half the unemployment benefit. It is worth remembering that single mothers can take advantage of the benefit of the right of priority when sending their children to school or school common room, they can count on school lunch funding, extraschool activity discounts and trips for children. Almost every single mother is entitled to child support and in some cases they can apply for alimony for themselves.

Child support suit can be filed in family and minors department of the court of one's place of residence. A single mother claiming child support is exempt from any court costs. The suit should include such information and documents as:

- child support amount;
- the suit's cause;
- the respondent's job, qualifications and financial situation – this information will be used to determine the amount of child support;
- copies of the suit for each party;
- copies of vital records.

Apart from the aforementioned, every mother is entitled to a bonus for giving birth to a baby – the so-called “becikowe”. It is a one-off amount of PLN 1,000. Apart from that, single mothers can apply for benefit. It is feasible, if:

- a child's father is dead or unknown;
- a mother's income does not exceed PLN 504 per person;

- the income does not exceed PLN 583, if the child is disabled.

The amount of this bonus is PLN 170 per month per child, yet it cannot exceed the amount of PLN 340 for all children. If a child is disabled, the amount is PLN 80 bigger per child, yet, it cannot exceed PLN 160 per all children. If the income per person is lower than PLN 252 or 291.50 in case of a disabled child, the bonus is PLN 50 bigger per every child, yet, it cannot exceed PLN 100 per all children. The rights of a single mother with a child also include the right to maternity and child care leave, if she had a job contract before the baby was born. Apart from that, a single mother has additional 2 days of leave for child care.

Every woman in Poland is entitled to maternity leave. In 2015 the duration of maternity leave was changed. It is now 12 months. It is a paid leave. Maternity leave can be used before birth, but it has to be at least two weeks. If a pregnant woman does not use maternity leave before the due date, the first day of maternity leave is then the day her baby is born. After childbirth, a woman is entitled to maternity leave and leave unused before birth until the maximum period is exhausted. According to Labour Code there is no obligation to apply for basic maternity leave. However, the majority of employers demand this from their employees, which is justified with practical reasons, i.e. to know the due date estimated by a doctor and the first day the maternity leave should be counted from. If, however, a pregnant employee wants to use maternity leave before birth or if she applies for additional maternity leave, then, each time she has to file an appropriate application with the employer. An employee can resign from a part of maternity leave, only if this part is used by the child's father. If there is no employee – father raising the child the woman could share maternity leave with, or if the father refuses to use a part of the maternity leave, the mother – employee is entitled to, then the woman has to use the full leave. After childbirth, every woman is entitled to a benefit of PLN 1,000 (benefit for giving birth to a baby). The law protects pregnant women from:

- being dismissed from work;
- temporary job contract expiring before the due date;
- delegations;
- overtime work;
- night shifts;
- harmful or arduous working conditions;
- intermittent work.

Apart from maternity leave a woman is also entitled to child care leave. Child care leave is the time after the end of maternity leave. Both a woman and a man are entitled to this leave. It is an unpaid period of leave, as paid child care leave only applies to people with low income. Insurance rate during child care leave is paid by state budget. Duration of child care leave differs, but it can be 3 years maximum and it must finish before the child turns 4. Prolongation is only granted in special cases. During the leave, the employment relationship is under special protection and its termination can only happen in case of disciplinary dismissal or business failure. There are differences between maternity and child care leave. First, as opposed to maternity leave, child care leave can

be used both by a woman and by a man if they had worked for at least 6 months under job contract. Second, while on child care leave, the carer is not entitled to financial benefits, as they are during maternity leave. Only people whose income per one family member does not exceed PLN 504 net are entitled to paid child care leave. It is calculated on the basis of the sum of all the family's incomes in the year preceding the maternity leave. If the income is lower than the indicated amount, the person gets PLN 400 every month. During child care leave, the rate of mandatory social insurance is paid by state budget. Child care leave differs from maternity leave in terms of duration. Obligatory maternity leave after giving birth to one baby during one childbirth is 20 weeks, whereas the duration of child care leave is much less regulated. It turns out that child care leave can last even for 3 years and it has to be used before the child turns 4. In addition, child care leave can be prolonged with another 3 years before the child turns 18, if the child requires a full-time care of a parent due to an illness.

An employee going on child care leave is subject to special protection of employment relationship. Because of that an employer cannot terminate an employee's job contract and after their return from the leave, they must be employed on the same position as before. If it is not possible to employ a person on the same position as before child care leave, an employee is obliged to employ them on an equal position or position corresponding to their qualifications, with remuneration remaining on the same level as before child care leave. Termination of a job contract during child care leave can only happen in case of business failure or disciplinary dismissal.

The state should provide financial help to anyone who needs it. Social welfare usually provides the so-called care allowance. Its recipients are mainly mothers who resign from work for the period of raising their children. Then, they are entitled to material support in the form of family benefit. It is granted to mothers taking care of children under 8. Also people who stop working due to the fact that kindergarten or nursery have been closed are entitled to this benefit. This support is also provided to married couples, if one of them remains mostly in hospital, while the other takes care of their child. It is worth mentioning that both mothers and fathers can apply for this assistance.

Care allowance is paid to people who are covered by health insurance. Examples of such people are employees, farmers, people conducting business, people serving alternative forms of military service and even clergymen. However, such people have to be relieved of the obligation to perform work due to taking care of a small child under 8 because of unexpected causes, due to taking care of a sick child under 14 and other family members, like parents, grandparents, etc. It is important that, as has been mentioned before, both a mother and a father are entitled to this benefit. As for paying the benefit, the money is given to one parent only – the one who filed an application. It is also important that this benefit is payable only if there is no other family member who could take care of the given person. The only exception is taking care of a sick child under 2, in which case the benefit is payable even if there are other family members able to provide care. This benefit is payable while a person is relieved from the obligation to perform work, not longer than:

- 60 days if care is provided to a child under 8 or to a sick child under 14;
- 14 days if care is provided to a child over 14 or to other family members who are sick.

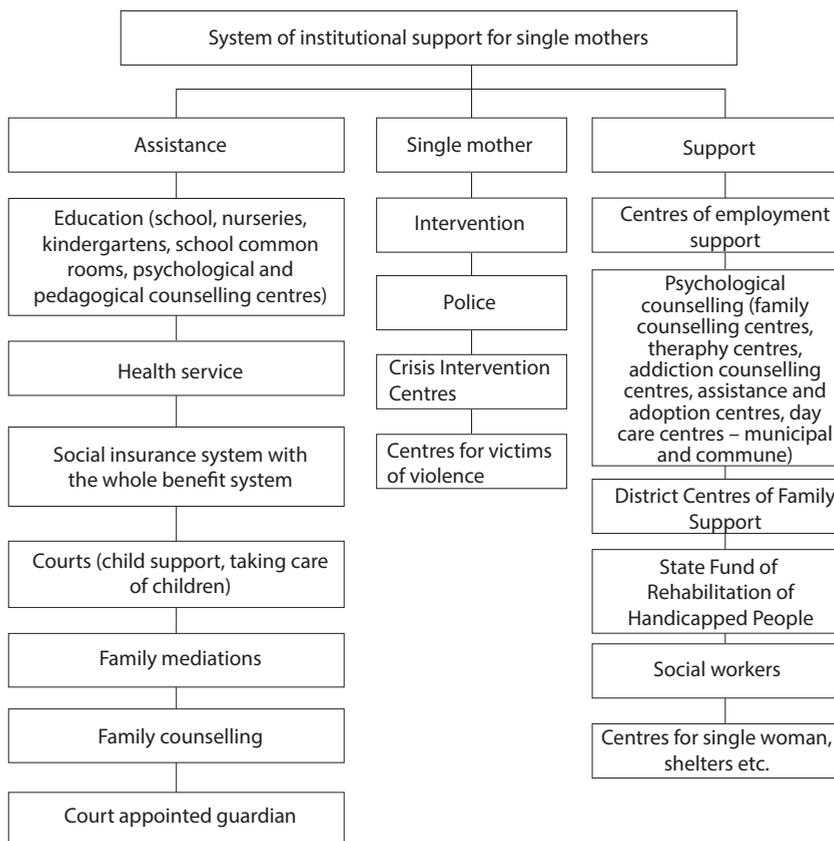
The amount of material assistance is 80% of remuneration, whereas its base for employees respectively is constituted by an average monthly remuneration paid for 12 months before the inability to work. If this inability began before the period of 12 months, then, what is considered is the income in the form of health insurance rates. In case of insured people who are not employed, what is considered is monthly income, to which a health insurance rate is paid for the period of 12 months.

The most important benefits for single mothers are family benefits; the most important family benefit is family allowance, family allowance bonuses and care allowances. The first two are granted mainly on the basis of income per one family member. Care components (care allowance, social benefit) depend on income. It is between PLN 30 and 418. It should be mentioned that a lot of women do not know their rights and find out about them only from workers of different assistance institutions. According to interviews done with women in the Centre for Violence Victims in Cracow in 2012–2013 and Centre for Single Mothers in Cracow in 2013, the biggest problem single women encounter is finding a job and remaining employed. Combining work with raising children is a very difficult challenge for a lot of women.

A woman having children is very often discriminated against in the labour market (Goraus 2013). Employers do not want to hire women with children. According to interviews with women having small children, employers did not hire them full-time. Young women find it difficult to get a full-time job, as it involves certain responsibility on the employer's part. Employers are forced to terminate contracts with women and not to prolong them due to women's frequent absence related to children's illnesses. On the other hand, the system requires that a woman is quickly active in the labour market. Apart from that, it should be emphasised that mothers applying for assistance from social welfare lack specialist education that would make them more employable. They are often women whose education finished after primary school – 30% and middle school – 30%. 20% have vocational education, 16% finished secondary school and 4% of them have a university degree.

Single mothers who have serious life difficulties and cannot find shelter for themselves and for their children can go to centres created for their needs, such as Centres for single mothers, Centres for mothers and children (for juvenile mothers), Crisis Intervention Centres (each with its own hotel infrastructure), Centres for victims of violence. Women looking for shelter in these centres receive psychological, legal, social and pedagogical support. Very often, women who look for support due to various life problems have difficulties building relations with their close ones, they have family problems, undergo crises in relationships, suffer from sorrow, apathy, have psychosomatic, depressive or neurotic symptoms. They have to deal with their own or their children's sickness, they encounter difficulties at work, cannot or do not know how to deal with stress, have sleeping or eating disorders. They are often overwhelmed after pregnancy and childbirth. They

are left alone with their problems, social benefits are not enough for them to be able to devote their time to taking care of children only. My observation and long lasting research in Centre for Single Mothers show that women are demotivated as far as undertaking work is concerned, as the work they start (it is sometimes 10–12 hours a day) does not provide them with such profit as would allow them to become totally independent. Due to limited volume of this study, I will only present the activity of social welfare for single mothers in a graphical form below (schema 1).



Schema 1. The activity of social welfare for single mothers

Source: Own study.

Conclusion

Social institutions and organisations employ professionals, who provide different types of help, fulfilling cognitive, emotional and social needs considered important for the life and development of people, families and society, to make sure that help reaches those who need it and to fulfil the needs of adults and children. Even though welfare system for single mothers is very complex, one issue that is often omitted is the employment of young women in the labour market, or even “pressing” young mothers to work. It is usually done at the cost of women’s health (too much responsibility, double or triple). Their children suffer because of that (lack of parental care, broken emotional bonds, lack of time for the close ones). This situation is often related to the issue of discriminating against women in the labour market (working for 8–12 hours instead of 8 only, lack of promotion, small remuneration making women dependent on the employer). Small salaries of the working class force it to use the system of social welfare, distribute poverty and exclusion of families and children (Geisen 2005). The material presented is only a fragment of research related to assistance for single mother families. Due to the topic of this article, it lacks unintentional forms of family support. An exhaustive analysis would have to show institutional and non-institutional support system. The aforementioned data relates to some chosen situations and problems of single women in the Polish social system.

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