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Čekolj, Nadja

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# Pedagogy Students' Attitudes Towards Single Motherhood – Challenges and Perspectives

Nadja Čekolj

*University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Education*

## **Abstract**

*To create a quality partnership between pedagogues and diverse family structures, it is important to have positive attitudes towards parenting competencies of single mothers and the whole family dynamics. The aim of the research was to question attitudes of pedagogy students towards different types of single motherhood. The difference in attitudes towards various types of single motherhood considering students' socio-demographic characteristics was analyzed. The research was conducted by means of a questionnaire. The participants were pedagogy students (N=110) at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The results showed that pedagogy students mostly express positive attitudes towards single motherhood, however, there is a difference in attitudes concerning the type of single motherhood. Female students show more positive attitudes towards all types of single motherhood. First-year graduate students have more positive attitudes than first-year undergraduate students, which leads to the conclusion that the education of professional associates - pedagogues has a major role in creating positive attitudes towards different family structures and improving cooperation with parents from such families.*

**Key words:** *divorced single mothers; partnership between educational institutions and single mothers; single mothers by choice; widows.*

## **Introduction**

Previous studies suggest that attitudes towards single mothers or single-parent families in general have never been positive (Amato, 2000, as cited in Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Ganong, Coleman, & Mapes, 1990; Halimi, 1997; Raboteg-Šarić & Pećnik, 2009; Worell, 1985). Judith Worell's results (1985) showed negative attitudes towards

single mothers, who are perceived as bad mothers because they do not meet the criteria of a good woman and are not considered capable of the role of mother and wife. There are myths and stigma towards single mothers concerning the cause of their status. Divorced mothers who do not have custody of their children are seen as cold and less caring, whereas divorced mothers with custody are blamed for child's difficulty to adjust to the environment (Worell, 1985). Ganong, Coleman, and Mapes' (1990) research yielded similar results. Divorced mothers were stereotyped as lonely, unhappy, poor and under stress, but were not seen as bad mothers in terms of education. Unmarried mothers were perceived as mothers with the least positive qualities, as irresponsible, selfish and impatient, unsuccessful partners, and as mothers with the least upbringing skills (Ganong & Coleman, 1995). Research conducted in Croatia (Halmi, 1997; Raboteg-Šarić & Pećnik, 2009) confirmed negative attitudes towards single mothers as well. Widows and widowers are perceived in the most positive manner, whereas divorced and unmarried parents are perceived negatively. This raises questions of morality: whether they deserve help from society and the government, and to what extent. Widows are treated as the group that is most deserving because they could not be blamed for the death of their spouse (Raboteg-Šarić & Pećnik, 2009), while divorced and unmarried mothers are considered morally irresponsible and selfish for putting their well-being before the well-being of their children (Amato, 2000 as cited in Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002). Negative attitudes towards single mothers are extremely problematic because they stigmatize single mothers and their children. That attitude can lead to the feeling of helplessness, depression, shame, and low self-esteem (Davis & Hagen, 1996 as cited in Dejean, McGeorge, & Stone Carlson, 2012), which can negatively affect the entire family climate as well as the quality of family upbringing and education. Negative attitudes and prejudice can cause even greater social vulnerability of single mothers since those attitudes are a part of social context that determines the quality of their life and the lives of their children (Raboteg-Šarić & Pećnik, 2009).

This paper focuses on the attitudes towards single motherhood from the perspective of pedagogy students – future experts in educational institutions, whose role implies professional pedagogical work with children and parents from different family structures, including single mothers and their children. To create quality partnership between parents and pedagogists, it is important to know the needs and problems of single mothers that come from their family structure. Even though educating pedagogues has great importance, curricula of pedagogy studies are not adapted enough to the diversification of family structure in contemporary society. This paper aims to compare the attitudes of first-year undergraduate pedagogy students ("first-year") and first-year graduate pedagogy students ("fourth-year") at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb, towards different types of single motherhood (widows, divorced mothers, and single mothers by choice). The first aim was to learn whether there is a difference in attitudes according to different types of single motherhood with respect to the year of study (undergraduate or graduate) and classes

taken that teach about family and alternative family structures<sup>1</sup>. The second aim was to analyze the differences in attitudes of pedagogy students towards different types of single motherhood considering students' socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics.

Partnership between families and educational institutions implies parents' involvement and participation in the work of the institution, while education professionals ("experts") collaborate with parents (Braun, 1992; Gestwicki, 1987 as cited in Maleš, 2003), in this case with single mothers. The partnership between experts and parents includes "mutual respect, sharing of information, feelings and skills, negotiation, mutual decision-making and recognition of family individuality" (Pugh & De'Ath, 1989 as cited in Maleš, 2003, p. 290). In such relationship parents and experts are equals, active in the sense they all collaborate in encouraging children's development, i.e. they have certain rights and duties (Pugh & De'Ath, 1989 as cited in Maleš, 1995). This ideal form of partnership is not frequently encountered. Research results show insufficient collaboration between educational institutions and parents in general, i.e. parents are dissatisfied with experts and their indifference for collaboration (Lukaš & Gazibara, 2010). Positive partnership has beneficial effect on all its participants. Henderson and Mapp (2002 as cited in Grant & Ray, 2009) concluded that children whose parents are involved in their education and cooperate with school, achieve better school success, are well adjusted, have fewer behavioral problems, and better social skills. Parents who cooperate with educational institutions are more informed about school structures and programs, and have more understanding for their children (Diffily, 2004 as cited in Grant & Ray, 2009). Cotton and Wikelund's (2001) research showed that parents who are involved in the work of educational institutions develop and improve parenting skills and feel more confident in their role as a parent. Finally, in that way, experts receive parents' support for their work (Grant & Ray, 2009). Longitudinal research on single mothers yielded significant results. It showed that parents' involvement is a very important factor for a child's successful development (Eiduson, 1983; Eiduson & Weisner, 1978 as cited in Weinraub, Horvath, & Maray, 2002).

However, larger pluralization of the types of family structure brings new challenges in creating positive partnership between families and educational institutions. For the partnership to be successful, experts need to be informed about specificities of each family (Olsen & Fuller, 2008). Ignorance, negative attitudes and lack of understanding for the specificity of each family structure is an obstacle in establishing good cooperation between experts and families. Experts tend to have prejudice when it comes to alternative forms of families, they do not consider such parents as competent (Grant & Ray, 2009), which can be very demeaning for parents. This leads to less cooperation between experts and parents (Bloom, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> First-year students attended the course Family pedagogy, while fourth year students, in addition, attended the course Family and education institution partnership as well as the number of courses from the intercultural module that question diversity in the education system.

This paper addresses single motherhood, and all the different circumstances which caused them to become single mothers. It focuses on single divorced mothers, widows, and single mothers by choice. Single mothers in this paper are defined as *mothers who dominantly, independently, without the help of the other parent, take care of the child* (Raboteg-Šarić, Pećnik, & Josipović, 2003). It is important to emphasize that this paper focuses only on attitudes towards single mothers who are at the moment single, who were not remarried and are not in cohabitation. This limitation is important because it excludes any help from a partner and is focused on the difficulties experienced by single mothers and the way they handle these difficulties themselves. Divorced mothers are an exception because there is a possibility of former partner's help, which is elicited in the definition in the questionnaire so participants could take this into account while filling out the questionnaire. Divorced mothers are defined as mothers who, after divorce, become primary custodians of their children, with the possibility of financial, educational or emotional assistance from the child's father. Widows are defined as mothers who independently raise children after the death of their spouse. Mothers by choice are defined as unmarried mothers who independently decide on maternity without a partner.

From previously defined research aims, and based on the findings presented in the theoretical review, the following research hypotheses arise:

1. There is a difference in pedagogy students' attitudes towards different types of single motherhood.
2. There is a difference in pedagogy students' attitudes towards single motherhood considering their socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics.

## Methodology

### Participants

The study included 110 pedagogy students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb. The survey method was used on an appropriate quota sample of first-year undergraduate (44%) and first-year graduate (56%) pedagogy students. There is a significant difference between the participants according to gender (90% females and 10% males), which is in accordance with the gender structure of students at the Department of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. This gender structure indicates the feminization of the pedagogical profession that is becoming more and more evident (Ledić, Staničić, & Turk, 2013). The majority of participants (85%) spent most of their lives in two-parent families, while 15% of the participants came from alternative family structures (most often single-parent families where the single parent was a mother). Variable parent's education yielded almost equal results for both mothers and fathers. Most parents had secondary school diploma (57.3% mothers, 56.4% fathers), followed by a higher school or college diploma (30.9% mothers and fathers). Similarly, there were more parents with a master's degree,

doctorate, specialization and more (6.4% mothers and 7.3% fathers) than parents who completed only elementary school (4.5% mothers and 3.6% fathers). Participants also had the option "Not applicable" in case they were not familiar with the level of education of one of the parents (in total 3 participants). The variable religion had the majority of participants answer that they were religious in their own way (42%). There was an almost equal number of participants who answered they were religious according to the Church teaching (25%) and those who were not religious (23%). A small number of participants were unsure of their religiosity (8%) or were against religion (3%). Considering the place of residence, there was an equal percentage of participants in all categories - less than 10 000 residents (29%), from 10 001 to 70 000 residents (30%) and more than 500 000 residents (36%). In the category from 70 001 to 150 000 residents there were only 5 participants, while only 1 participant came from a city with 150 001 to 500 000 residents.

### **Research Instruments**

The participants were informed about the subject, purpose and objectives of the research via a separate form, verbally before the distribution of questionnaires, and in the introductory part of the questionnaire. The participants completed the questionnaire independently and were familiar with the right to anonymity and waiver of participation in the research.

For the purpose of this study, a scale was constructed that consists of 32 items divided into 6 subscales: *Economic security*, *Psychological health*, *Assessment of greater need for formal social support*, *Supervision*, *Support* and *Punishment*. A factor analysis of principal components (GK criterion, direct oblimin rotation) was conducted for each subscale and the validity of the scale was assessed using the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of internal consistency. Tests and analyses were conducted on all subscales and levels of single motherhood at the level of statistical significance of 5%.

The participants' task was to determine their level of agreement with each of the 32 items by choosing one of the five levels on an associated ordinal scale (strongly disagree/ disagree/neither agree nor disagree/agree/strongly agree). The higher score on each subscale indicated more positive attitude towards the subject of measurement, so all the claims that were negatively formulated in the questionnaire before administering tests and analyses, were recoded so that all claims followed the same course. Each subscale was assessed for each type of single motherhood separately (widows, divorced, by choice). In the introductory part of the questionnaire, the participants were given the definition of single mothers as well as the definition of each type separately to reduce the possibility of different interpretations.

### **Subscale Economic Security**

This subscale consists of six items and it measures the attitude of participants towards economic stability of single mothers as well as the effect of economic status on the quality of family upbringing (e.g., "Single mothers are mainly poor"; "Single mothers

can provide a stimulating educational surrounding for their children”). In all single motherhood types Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient is satisfactory and amounts to 0.77. The factor analysis of main components extracted one factor for each type. The percentage of total interpreted variance for widows was 48.17%, for divorced 47.35% and for single mothers by choice was 47.45%.

### **Subscale Psychological Health**

The subscale consists of five items, and it measures the attitude towards psychological stability of single mothers and content with their lives (e.g., “Single mothers are irritable”; “Single mothers are dissatisfied with their lives”). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for widows and divorced single mothers is satisfactory (0.74; 0.76), while for single mothers by choice amounts to 0.57. By excluding two items the coefficient of reliability would increase. These two items also have low item total correlation (0.180; 0.220) and low factor loading on the subscale psychological health of single mothers by choice. Factor analysis extracted one factor for each type and the percentage of total variance explained for widows was 49.53%, divorced 51.20% and for single mothers by choice 39.83%. If the problematic item on the psychological health of single divorced mothers and single mothers by choice scale was excluded, total variance explained would increase to 60.51%, i.e. to 47.98%. If the second item on the psychological health of single mothers by choice was excluded, in addition to the exclusion of the first item, the total variance explained would amount to 59.82%. Listed items were not excluded for retaining the scale's content validity and the possibility to compare appropriate subscales of the remaining two types of single motherhood.

### **Subscale Assessment of Greater Need for Formal Social Support**

The subscale consists of 7 items and measures the attitude towards the need for the state and its institutions to help single mothers, as well as the attitude towards the need for higher child support and other benefits such as kindergarten enrollment or free school books compared to two-parent families (e.g. “The state/government does not provide enough help to single mothers”; “Single mothers should have an advantage at hiring”). The reliability coefficient for widows and divorced single mothers is 0.71, and for single mothers by choice is 0.72. The increase of coefficient is only possible by excluding one item in widow type, an item that carries small item-total correlation. Factor analysis of main components in all single motherhood types extracted 2 factors and total variance explained was 55.41% for widows, 56.10% for divorced, and 55.90% for single mothers by choice. The first factor gathers items that relate to the employment status of single mothers, i.e. the possibility of flexible working hours and advantage at hiring. The second factor relates to institutions that should accommodate to the needs of single mothers, i.e. increase of child support, advantage at kindergarten enrollment, free school books, as well as the help and support of professional staff in educational institutions.

### **Subscale Supervision**

The supervision scale consists of 5 items and measures the attitude towards the quality of family upbringing, i.e. it measures the opinion: how well single mothers are acquainted with children's activities, people they socialize with and places where they spend their free time (e.g. "Single mothers do not supervise their children enough"; "Single mothers are not well acquainted with whom their children spend time"). Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient for widows is 0.69, for divorced 0.73 and for single mothers by choice is 0.64, which is satisfactory concerning the number of items. Factor analysis extracted one factor for each type of single motherhood with the following total variance explained: 41.39%, 49.45%, 41.75%.

### **Subscale Support**

The support subscale consists of 6 items that measure attitudes towards warmth, support and nurture of single mothers compared to mothers from two-parent families. Reliability coefficients are relatively low for all single motherhood types (0.58; 0.59; 0.57), however, not one item was excluded for pertaining to the subscale's content validity and ability to compare the remaining types of single motherhood. Factor analysis of main components extracted two factors for widows and divorced single mothers, while on the scale for single mothers by choice three factors were extracted, with one specific component. Total variance explained are as follows: 55.60%, 58.27% and 7.95%. The first factor includes indicators "warmth", and "support" (e.g. "Single mothers have a more intimate relationship with children than mothers from two-parent families", "Single mothers give more emotional support to children than mothers from two-parent families"). The second factor is "sensitivity to children's needs" and "joint decision making" (e.g. "Single mothers are caring mothers", "Single mothers include children in making important decisions for the family"). The first factor describes the relationship between single mothers and children, while the second factor relates to caring for the children, except the item about joint decision making, which should, in theory, belong to mother-children relationship.

### **Subscale Punishment**

The punishment subscale contains three items, and it measures the attitude towards punishment as an educational method, i.e. whether single mothers compared to mothers from two-parent families punish children more often, both verbally and physically (e.g. "Single mothers use physical punishment as a disciplinary method more often than mothers from two-parent families"; "Single mothers yell at children more often than mothers two-parent parent families"). The reliability coefficient is satisfactory for each type (0.73; 0.83; 0.70) and there is no possibility for its increase. Factorization extracted one factor for each type with total variance explained 65.28%, 74.91% and 62.11%.

Even though reliability coefficients for some scales are less than 0.80, reliability is still considered satisfactory. The instruments have satisfactory reliability because reliability



depends on various factors such as the object of measures or the number of items on a scale. In this case, a relatively small sample as well as the fact that some subscales have a minimum of three and a maximum of seven items could be the cause for the lower reliability coefficient of some scales. Table 1 systematically portrays the results of the factor analyses of principal components and Cronbach alpha coefficients for all subscales.

Table 1  
Reliability and dimensionality of the subscales

Subscale	Types of single motherhood	RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT		FACTOR ANALYSIS	
		$\alpha$	Item-total correlation	Number of factors	%variance
Economic security	Widows	0.77	0.298 - 0.652	1	48.17%
	Divorced	0.77	0.322 - 0.635	1	47.35%
	By choice	0.77	0.399 - 0.690	1	47.45%
Psychological health	Widows	0.74	0.343 - 0.628	1	49.53%
	Divorced	0.76	0.298 - 0.681	1	51.20%
	By choice	0.57	0.180 - 0.552	1	39.86%
Assessment of greater need for formal social support	Widows	0.71	0.154 - 0.617	2	55.41%
	Divorced	0.71	0.319 - 0.540	2	56.10%
	By choice	0.72	0.338 - 0.581	2	55.90%
Supervision	Widows	0.69	0.312 - 0.593	1	41.39%
	Divorced	0.73	0.306 - 0.663	1	49.45%
	By choice	0.64	0.263 - 0.549	1	41.75%
Support	Widows	0.58	0.226 - 0.511	2	55.60%
	Divorced	0.59	0.219 - 0.510	2	58.28%
	By choice	0.57	0.098 - 0.536	3	70.95%
Punishment	Widows	0.73	0.525 - 0.569	1	65.28%
	Divorced	0.83	0.675 - 0.710	1	74.91%
	By choice	0.70	0.473 - 0.561	1	62.11%

## Results and Discussion

### *Differences in Attitudes According to the Type of Single Motherhood*

To determine if there is a difference in attitudes according to different types of motherhood on all six subscales, new, additional variables were created so the result on the new variable is equal to the sum of results of all items on that subscale, and for each type of single motherhood. A total of 18 new variables were created specifically for each subscale (6) and specifically for each single motherhood type (3). New variables *Economic security* and *Support* have the smallest theoretical result 6, while the biggest is 30 (theoretical mean value = 18). *Psychological health* and *Supervision* have the smallest theoretical result 5, and the biggest 25 (theoretical mean value = 15), variable *Assessment of greater need for formal social support* has a range of results from 7 to 35 (theoretical

mean value = 21), while variable *Punishment* has a range from 3 to 15 (theoretical mean value = 9).

To determine a statistically significant difference between the types of single motherhood, the analysis of variance for repeated measures was used. The analyses show that in almost all subscales, attitudes towards single mothers by choice are the most positive, while attitudes towards divorced mothers are the least positive. On the subscale *Assessment of greater need for formal social support* the most positive attitudes are towards widows, and the least positive towards single mothers by choice. Even though there is statistically significant difference in attitudes towards types of single motherhood, it is essential to stress that on all subscales the total sum of results is close to the middle of the assessment scale, which indicates participants' incapability to evaluate agreement level with items, but it also shows tendencies towards more positive attitudes (Table 2).

The first hypothesis, which claims that pedagogy students show different attitudes towards different types of single motherhood, is confirmed. However, the results are not in accordance with previous studies (Bennett & Jamieson, 1999; Bryan, Coleman & Ganong, 2012 as cited in Dejean et al., 2012; Ganong & Coleman, 1995; Halmi, 1997; Raboteg-Šarić & Pećnik, 2009) that showed the most positive attitudes towards widows, while those towards unmarried mothers were the most negative. It is important to emphasize that single mothers by choice type was not listed in the mentioned studies in the way it was defined in this paper. In almost all studies, type "unmarried mothers" was researched, even though the term was not specified enough. This type can comprise adolescent mothers, women who, for particular circumstances, have not married the father of the child, and single mothers by choice. These types of unmarried mothers cannot be equal to the single mothers by choice type because they differ in economic status, employment status and other socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics. Bock (2000) emphasizes that single mothers by choice have to meet the following criteria: they have to be over 30 years old, responsible, and emotionally and financially stable. Some authors say that single mothers by choice are the result of the feminist concerns, and the desire for independent lifestyle far from traditional family styles (Eiduson & Weisner, 1978 as cited in Weinraub et al., 2002). Additional reason for choosing single motherhood is the so called ticking of the "biological clock" (Bock, 2000), i.e. the inability to find a suitable partner with whom a woman/mother would raise a child. Kušević (2013) dealt with the phenomenon of postponed parenthood, which she defined as a parenthood in which parents (or a single parent) at the time of the birth of their first child are 35 years or older. As reasons for postponing parenthood until the thirties or even later, the author lists longer education and accomplishing higher levels of education, which can be connected to the listed group of women who independently choose single motherhood. The decision for one to become a single mother is difficult and long lasting; it requires changes in lifestyle, environment, job or career. Modern women, no matter their socio-economic status, do not choose to get married easily,

and economic factors are more and more important in making such decision. Women do not want to marry financially unstable men who will not contribute to the family's well-being, nor do they want to be subordinate and expect husband's emotional support. Therefore, they opt for single motherhood over risking marrying a man who will be a burden to the entire family (Edin, 2000).

The results lead to the conclusion that positive attitudes towards single mothers by choice are the result of a clear definition of the statement in the introductory part of the questionnaire that said: "single mothers by choice are unmarried women who independently choose to become mothers without the partner". It can be concluded that this definition influenced students' answers, as well as the familiarity of pedagogy students with theory, and family definitions and its alternative forms.

Table 2  
Differences between types of single motherhood

Subscale	Types of single motherhood	M	SD	p	Differences
Economic security*	1 - Widows	21.8	3.80	< 0.001	3 > 1.2
	2 - Divorced	21.6	3.66		
	3 - By choice	23.9	3.42		
Psychological health **	1 - Widows	15.9	3.74	< 0.001	3 > 1.2
	2 - Divorced	15.5	3.67		
	3 - By choice	18.8	2.82		
Assessment of greater need for formal social support ***	1 - Widows	27.0	4.14	< 0.001	1 > 2.3 2 > 3
	2 - Divorced	26.1	4.67		
	3 - By choice	24.4	4.67		
Supervision**	1 - Widows	19.9	2.81	< 0.001	3 > 1.2 1 > 2
	2 - Divorced	19.3	3.23		
	3 - By choice	20.5	2.48		
Support*	1 - Widows	21.2	3.47	< 0.001	1.3 > 2
	2 - Divorced	20.3	3.44		
	3 - By choice	21.7	3.50		
Punishment****	1 - Widows	12.1	2.18	< 0.001	1.3 > 2
	2 - Divorced	11.6	2.63		
	3 - By choice	12.3	2.00		

Note: p < .05; Analyses used: analysis of variance for repeated measurements and Bonferroni post hoc test; \* Theoretical mean value = 18; \*\* Theoretical mean value = 15; \*\*\* Theoretical mean value = 21; \*\*\*\* Theoretical mean value = 9

The least positive attitudes towards single mothers by choice on the subscale *Assessment of greater need for formal social support* can also be explained by the given definition in the introductory part of the questionnaire, which can lead to the conclusion that such mothers should not ask for any help from the government nor any special treatment from educational institutions since they independently chose to become

single mothers. It is unusual that attitudes towards divorced mothers take second place on the subscale of social support, since their situation is rather unfavorable to that of widows. Namely, widows already receive more formal social support than any other type of single motherhood, and the Act on pension insurance (2015) regulates their right to family pension, i.e. ensuring the financial support for raising their children, while social reality for divorced mothers in Croatia is much more serious. The divorce process is long lasting, expensive and difficult, and there is no way to “force” the father to fulfill his obligation to pay the alimony (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003). Moreover, negative attitudes must also be taken into account, which further complicates the situation of divorced mothers. The results obtained may be related to the question of morality, i.e. the question of the amount of help that single mothers “deserve”. Widows are considered to be the most deserving since they have lost a spouse out of no fault of their own, while there is a stereotype that divorced mothers use the divorce as the means of getting an apartment or alimony more easily (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003). Due to all the above, and because the participants are to be future pedagogues, it is unusual to express views on the greater need for formal social support for widows than for divorced mothers.

### ***Differences in Attitudes According to Gender***

To determine the differences in attitudes considering the gender, the Mann-Whitney U test was used. The analysis of results showed that there is a statistically significant difference on the *Economic security* subscale in types widows and single mothers by choice, on the *Assessment of greater need for formal social support* subscale in types single mothers by choice and on the subscales *Supervision* and *Punishment* in all types of single motherhood. Female students show greater mean rank on all subscales that show statistically significant difference, i.e. they show more positive attitudes than male students. However, a clear difference in attitudes cannot be determined since male students are underrepresented (M=10%, F=90%). It is important to consider that the study was conducted at the Department of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb where men are outnumbered by women. It can be assumed that the results would not have been any different if students from any level at the Department of Pedagogy had been included. However, some studies show that women have less traditional attitudes related to gender issues, family and marriage and are more inclined towards negative attitudes towards traditional family values (Trent & South, 1992). Raboteg-Šarić et al. (2003) emphasize that the role of women in society has changed more than the role of men, which can be the reason for more tolerant attitudes of women towards different family forms. Table 3 portrays only statistically significant results.

Table 3

Statistically significant results in attitudes towards types of single motherhood according to gender

Subscales	Types of single motherhood	p*	MEAN RANK		M		SD	
			M	F	M	F	M	F
Economic security	Widows	0.026	35.3	57.8	19.8	22.1	2.18	3.88
	By choice	0.005	30.1	58.3	21.3	24.2	2.57	3.39
Assessment of greater need for formal social support	By choice	0.016	33.5	57.9	20.2	24.9	6.26	4.25
Supervision	Widows	0.028	35.6	57.7	18.4	20.1	2.29	2.82
	Divorced	0.007	31.2	58.2	16.7	19.6	2.97	3.15
	By choice	< 0.001	23.1	59.1	18.1	20.8	1.81	2.40
Punishment	Widows	0.019	34.3	57.9	10.7	12.3	1.56	2.19
	Divorced	0.009	31.8	58.1	9.6	11.8	2.25	2.59
	By choice	0.007	31.2	58.2	10.6	12.5	2.20	1.89

Note: p < .05; M=male, F=female; \* Mann-Whitney U test

### Differences in Attitudes According to the Year of Study

To determine the existence of statistically significant difference in attitudes according to the year of study, the Man-Whitney U test was used. Statistically significant differences on subscales *Psychological health*, *Supervision*, and *Punishment* in types widows and divorced mothers were determined. The difference in all single motherhood types was determined on the *Support* subscale. Only on this subscale, first-year students had higher mean ranks, i.e. more positive attitude than fourth-year students. On other subscales, fourth-year students had higher mean ranks, i.e. more positive attitudes towards different types of single motherhood. According to data from descriptive statistics, the average was close to the middle of the scale of the assessment that indicates the answer “I neither agree nor disagree” but there is a tendency towards positive values. Table 4 shows statistically significant results.

The obtained differences were expected considering the year of studies. Fourth-year students showed more positive attitudes towards single motherhood on subscales *Psychological health*, *Supervision* and *Punishment*. On the scale *Support* that measured attitudes towards warmth, support and care of single mothers, first-year students had more positive attitudes towards single motherhood. More positive attitudes of older students can be the result of attending courses that deal with family issues and alternative family structures. The same explanation can be used for negative attitudes of older students on the subscale *Support*. According to the literature, single-parent families are not as safe for raising children because of higher risk of poverty (Daggett, 2002; Fisher et al., 1998; Kahana, 1995 as cited in Cicak, 2010; Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003; Ross, 1995; Shapiro, 1996; Simons & associates, 1996 as cited in Amato, 2000), stress and depression

(Benzeval, 1998; Hope, Power, & Rodgers, 1999; Macran, Clarke, & Joshi, 1996; Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003; Whitehead & Burstroemi Diderrichsen, 2000 as cited in Weinraub et al., 2002). Students expressed the least positive attitudes towards divorced mothers whom they considered not to be fully devoted to children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002) since they are burdened with a conflict with their former partner. Widows also experience great life change and are less focused on their children as well, but they, in comparison to divorced mothers, receive greater support (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003), which can be an explanation for positive attitudes in the *Support* subscale.

Table 4

*Statistically significant differences in attitudes towards different types of motherhood according to the year of studies*

Subscale	Types of single motherhood	p*	MEAN RANK		M		SD	
			1.	4.	1.	4.	1.	4.
Psychological health	Widows	0.007	46.3	62.7	14.9	16.6	3.76	3.56
	Divorced	0.030	48.0	61.3	14.8	16.1	3.43	3.78
Supervision	Widows	0.049	48.8	60.7	19.4	20.3	2.86	2.73
	Divorced	0.037	48.3	61.1	18.7	19.8	3.33	3.09
Support	Widows	< 0.001	69.8	44.4	22.8	20.1	2.97	3.39
	Divorced	0.003	65.7	47.6	21.3	19.5	3.01	3.55
	By choice	< 0.001	70.0	44.3	23.2	20.6	2.80	3.57
Punishment	Widows	0.009	46.6	62.4	11.5	12.6	2.08	2.15
	Divorced	0.004	45.6	63.2	10.8	12.2	2.62	2.48

Note: 1. = first-year undergraduate students (first-year); 4. = first year graduate students (fourth-year);

\*Mann-Whitney U test

### ***Differences in Attitudes According to the Family Structure in which the Participants Spent Most of Their Lives***

The Mann-Whitney U test was administered and statistically significant difference was found in the subscale *Assessment of greater need for formal social support* for single mothers by choice. Students from single-parent families showed larger mean rank, i.e. they showed more positive attitudes, which can be interpreted as bad personal experience in terms of not receiving needed formal social support. Of course, this result should be taken with caution, as there is a large disparity among participants. These results are in line with the results of the previous study, which indicates that more contact with the source of stereotypes will likely result in its decrease (Aronson, 1980 as cited in Fine, 1986). Students who have experience with any form of alternative family, especially students from single-parent families caused by divorce are more inclined to accepting non-traditional family structures (Amato, 1988). Table 5 shows statistically significant result.

Table 5

Statistically significant differences in attitudes towards different types of motherhood according to the family structure in which the participants spent most of their lives

Subscale	Types of single motherhood	p*	MEAN RANK		M		SD	
			1	2	1	2	1	2
Assessment of greater need for formal social support	By choice	0.015	74.1	52.6	26.9	24.0	5.01	4.57

Note: 1=one-parent families; 2= two-parent families; \* Mann-Whitney U test

Statistically significant differences were not found on variables parents' education, religiosity level nor the size of the town in which participants spent most of their lives, which is contrary to expectations. Amato (1998) concludes that higher education of mothers is connected to non-traditional attitudes towards marriage, divorced and unmarried mothers. Also, negative relation between attitudes towards single motherhood and level of religiosity was expected since the Church holds negative attitudes towards non-traditional families (Raboteg-Šarić et al., 2003). What was also expected were more conservative attitudes of students from smaller towns. One reason for the lack of difference between attitudes and some socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics can be a small sample and small groups within the variables themselves. However, it is assumed that the results would not have been different if students from all years of studies at the Department of Pedagogy had participated in the study since these are students who have through their education gained knowledge that made them sensible to marginal groups, such as marginal groups in the family in this case. Furthermore, students of social sciences generally have more liberal views (Fichten, 1988). To be sure that there are no differences in this population, it would be necessary to examine the first-year students at the beginning of the academic year. It is likely that different results would be yielded, since participants would still be under the influence of the socio-cultural surroundings in which they spent most of their lives. What also needs to be considered is the possibility of giving socially desirable answers, since the students knew only pedagogy students were in the study and could assume the aim of research, i.e. that the aim was to discover if there are any negative attitudes towards people they will work with and provide support in the future. Furthermore, the questionnaire was administered in the classroom, while the professors were present, which could have created more pressure to circle the desired answer.

## Conclusion

The results showed that there is a difference in attitudes of pedagogy students towards different types of single motherhood, thus confirming the first hypothesis. The study showed that pedagogy students generally have a positive opinion of single motherhood, therefore they have a larger chance of creating positive partnership with single mothers, and it is assumed they will provide adequate support in their children's education.

However, there are differences in attitudes considering types of single motherhood. On almost every subscale, attitudes towards single mothers by choice are the most positive, while the least positive are towards divorced single mothers. The only subscale where students have the least positive attitudes towards single mothers by choice is *Assessment of greater need for formal social support*. It has to be considered that the participants are students without the experience in working with single mothers and their attitudes are still under the influence of theoretical knowledge.

The second hypothesis, that there is a difference in pedagogy students' attitudes towards single motherhood, according to their socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics is partially confirmed since a statistically significant difference was not found in all independent variables. A statistically significant difference was found in the variables gender, year of studies and family structure in which participants have spent most of their lives. As it was predicted, women, older students, and participants who have spent their lives in single parent families have more positive attitudes towards single motherhood.

This paper provides an introduction into a complex and marginalized topic that requires further research. These results and conclusions, as well as the comprehensive theoretical review offered in the introductory part of the paper will contribute to further research on this topic. In further research that aims to gain broader knowledge on this topic, we suggest questioning the difference in attitudes between various experts, such as teachers, pedagogues, social workers, as well as to research the differences in attitudes between pedagogy students and pedagogues in practice.

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**Nadja Čekolj**

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Department of Education

Sveučilišna avenija 4, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia

[nadja.cekolj@uniri.hr](mailto:nadja.cekolj@uniri.hr)

# Stavovi studenata pedagogije prema samohranom majčinstvu – izazovi i perspektive

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## **Sažetak**

*Za ostvarivanje kvalitetnog partnerstva stručnih suradnika – pedagoga s različitim strukturama obitelji nužno je imati pozitivne stavove prema roditeljskim kompetencijama samohranih majki i cjelokupnoj obiteljskoj dinamici. Cilj je bio ispitati stavove studenata pedagogije prema različitim kategorijama samohranog majčinstva. Analizirana je i razlika u stavovima studenata prema različitim kategorijama samohranog majčinstva s obzirom na socio-demografska obilježja studenata. Istraživanje je provedeno metodom ankete na prigodnom kvotnom uzorku studenata pedagogije (N=110) Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu. Rezultati su pokazali da studenti pedagogije imaju općenito pozitivan stav prema samohranom majčinstvu, ali da postoji razlika u stavovima s obzirom na kategoriju samohranog majčinstva. Također, studentice imaju pozitivnije stavove prema svim kategorijama samohranog majčinstva, a studenti četvrte godine imaju pozitivnije stavove od studenata prve godine. Zaključuje se da obrazovanje stručnih suradnika – pedagoga ima veliku važnost u stvaranju pozitivnih stavova prema različitim obiteljskim strukturama kako bi se unaprijedila suradnja s roditeljima iz različitih obiteljskih struktura.*

**Ključne riječi:** *partnerstvo odgojno-obrazovnih institucija sa samohranim majkama; razvedene samohrane majke; samohrane majke po izboru; udovice.*