

Reintegration difficulties of women cannot be viewed in isolation from reintegration problems of reorganized families, dealing with loss and change. Divorce is truly a family affair. We need to view the crisis of divorce as a situational life crisis of role transition, which

attacks all who divorce, not just disturbed individuals and families. Family agencies cannot reverse societal trends, but do have an obligation to recognize trends, assess their impact, and organize effective, efficient services to meet the needs of this population-at-risk.

## Perspectives on the Jewish Single-Parent Family\*

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*The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of the contemporary single-parent family in the Jewish community and to assess its impact on Jewish life. On the basis of a review of the special problems and potential strengths in such families we will also consider the services which are necessary to enable these families to find a significant place in the Jewish community and to enhance their potential contribution to Jewish continuity.*

The single-parent family is one of the most rapidly developing phenomena of Jewish communal life. Many of our leaders perceive the single-parent family as a calamitous result of the breakdown in Jewish values. For them it is the harbinger of the destruction of the Jewish family as we have known it. Others interpret this development as a new family life style marking a growing affirmation by Jewish women of their right to personal identity and fulfillment. Both of these attitudes reflect a tendency to seek unitarian, undifferentiated causes for complex social processes. Each contains an element of truth, but represents an extreme view. The growth of one-parent families results from many complex factors. It presents a challenge to the Jewish community, a challenge which requires understanding, analysis and planning.

### Growth In Number of Single-Parent Families

Most recent data regarding the growth of the single-parent family in the United States are a matter for deep concern. Analyzing census data for 1974, Ross and Sawhill point out, "Over the past decade, female-headed families with children have grown almost ten times as fast as two-parent families . . . By the mid-1970's one out of every seven children in the United States lived in a family where—whether because of death, divorce, separation, or an out-of-wedlock birth—the father was

absent."<sup>1</sup> A recent analysis indicates, as of 1976, 10.1% (7,335,000) of the total families in the United States was headed by a woman, and 2% (1,424,000) was headed by a man with spouse absent. Of 8,800,000 children in single-parent families, 800,000 were in families headed by a man. The number of white female family heads increased by 33.4% from 1970 to 1976.

Divorce, the major factor in the increase in white single families, almost tripled from 1960 to 1976. The increase in divorce from 1970 to 1976 (83.9%) was higher than that for the previous decade (76.6%). In contrast the number of families headed by a widow has declined by 4.6%.<sup>2</sup> From 1970 to 1976 the divorce rate for the total population has doubled from 2.5% per thousand of the population in 1970 to 5.0% in 1976. The increase in divorces is considerably higher for individuals under 45. The Census Bureau estimates: "If recent trends continue, one in every three married persons between 25 and 35 years of age may end their first marriage in divorce, and a higher proportion (about 4 in every 10) of those in their second marriage may end it in redi-orce."<sup>3</sup>

While husband-wife families with own

<sup>1</sup> Heather L. Ross and Isabel V. Sawhill, *Time of Transition. The Growth of Families Headed by Women*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Reports Series p. 20 No. 307*. "Population Profile of the U.S.: 1976, U.S. Gov't. Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1977, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*. p. 1.

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children under 18 diminished in New York City by 12.4% from 1960 to 1970, female heads of families with own children under 18 have increased by 80.8% constituting in 1970 9.3% of families in that category. Families with own children under 18 headed by a male without a wife present constituted 0.9% of such families, an increase of 25.8% over that same decade.<sup>4</sup>

### The Single-Parent Family in the Jewish Community

National and New York City figures do not necessarily reflect the situation within the Jewish community. The latest data available are those collected by the National Jewish Population Study in 1970. In a previous paper, on the basis of unpublished data from that study, I estimated: "2.9% of the total Jewish households in the United States fall in the category "headed by a woman with children only" and 0.4% in the category "headed by a man with children only."<sup>5</sup> If we assumed that these categories increased at the same rate for Jews as for the total population, we could assume, as of 1976, 3.9% of the Jewish household were headed by a woman with spouse absent and 0.5% were headed by a man with spouse absent. That figure would indicate a total of approximately 31,700 Jewish single-parent families in Greater New York.<sup>6</sup>

Studies have shown the rates of single parents to vary widely for different ethnic, racial and economic groups. A recent analysis in New York City of the incidence of

<sup>4</sup> Barbara D. Hanreider and R.A. Glazier, *Characteristics of the Population in N.Y.C. Health Areas: 1970 no. 30 Family Composition*. New York Community Council of N.Y.C., October 1973, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Alvin Chenkin of the Council of Jewish Federations & Welfare Funds for the data derived from the National Jewish Population Study.

<sup>6</sup> Total Jewish households 719,700. See Fred Massarik, "Basic Characteristics of the Greater New York Jewish Population," *American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Yearbook, 1976*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975, p. 239.

single-parent families by health districts reveals clearly that the incidence of such families is generally lower in those areas which have a high percentage of Jewish population.<sup>7</sup> From the data available, it is clear that while single-parent families are increasing in the Jewish community of New York, the incidence is lower proportionally than in the population as a whole.

### Experience of Jewish Agencies in Greater New York

While we can take some solace from this conclusion, it should not becloud the serious nature of the problem. Reports of social agencies, synagogues and other Jewish organizations indicate continued growth of the single-parent family and an increasing rate of divorce. Although we cannot assume that the data of Jewish social agencies precisely reflect the total Jewish community, their experience is significant. Our agencies consistently report the proportion of single families is considerably higher than reported for the Jewish community as a whole. For instance, Jewish Family Service of New York in 1955 found that 5% of its total number of families served were divorced or separated. By 1976 that figure had increased to 23% of the total<sup>8</sup> representing approximately 5,400 families. Of 1,330 new cases helped by the Federation-Jewish Community Council Service Center of the Rockaways from July 1, 1976 to June 30, 1977, 518 (39%) were single-parent families.

Of a total of 20,051 families served by New York Federation Y's and Centers, from July 1, 1975 through June 30, 1976, 3,148 (15.7%) were single-parent families representing an increase of 12.0% from the previous year, as against a 2.0% increase in two-parent family memberships. The percentage of single-parent families in the various Centers ranged from 5.4% to 43.3%. It is of interest to note that the

<sup>7</sup> B.D. Hanreider and R.A. Glazier *Op Cit.* pp. 15-23.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Lang, "Divorce and the Jewish Woman: A Family Agency Approach:" *This Journal*, Vol. LIV, No. 3 (1978), pp.

average number of children in the single-parent families served by the "Y's" was 2.03 compared to 2.19 in the two-parent families.<sup>9</sup> If we use these figures as representatives, we could estimate that there were 64,000 Jewish children in single-parent families in Metropolitan New York in 1976.

Data furnished by the Camping Division of the New York Federation provide a basis for a more detailed analysis of trends in the Jewish community. In 1976, 34.4% (2,630) of the total children served were from single-parent families. While the total number of children increased by 17% from 1970 to 1976, the number of children from single-parent families increased by 48.2%. The proportion of children from separated families remained constant over that period and those from widowed families actually diminished. The six-year increase in the number of children from divorced families was 151%.<sup>10</sup> Although we must be careful in drawing conclusions from such data, they provide strong evidence of an increase in Jewish single-parent families, particularly as a result of a growing divorce rate.

### Economic Status of Single-Parent Families

One-parent families constitute an increasingly significant proportion of the poverty group of the United States. In 1975 the median income for a family maintained by a female with no husband present (\$6,840) was 46% of the median income of husband-wife families (\$14,870). About 37% of families headed by a female had less than \$5,000 in 1975.<sup>11</sup> Although we do not have specific data for the Jewish community, the impressions of our agencies suggest that—next to the aged—the single-parent families comprise the largest component of the Jewish poor. A growing number of these families has had to turn to

<sup>9</sup> Max Orenstein has provided the data for Federation Y's and centers.

<sup>10</sup> I am deeply indebted to Asher Melzer, Social Planning Consultant in Camping of Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

<sup>11</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Op Cit.* p. 30.

public assistance. In applying for welfare many families have been subjected to harassment.<sup>12</sup> They have often experienced considerable difficulty in achieving eligibility and obtaining their rightful benefits. Strong advocacy by family and out-reach social workers has sometimes been necessary to help such clients obtain appropriate assistance.

Most single-parent families, even those who were at fairly high income levels, have experienced a substantial lowering of the living standards on becoming a single-parent family. Such a reduction in income has ramifications in the mother's relationship to the children. Hard as it is for mothers to accommodate themselves to a loss of income and to the reduction in their status, it is even more difficult for them to see their children struggle with this problem. Inability to provide the children with what they are accustomed to have and what their peer group enjoys is a source of constant guilt and concern for the mothers. Payment of allocations by former husbands are frequently irregular. Such financial uncertainty as well as the vicissitudes and costliness of legal procedures add to the burden of the single mother. Free legal services, while available for some, generally do not extend to the complex proceedings necessary to assure support. The legal system itself, in viewing the married couple not as "an independent entity" but as an "association of two independent individuals," has tended to reduce the power of the single mother to obtain adequate support from the absent father.<sup>13</sup> Thus far we have not found the means of providing the legal assistance for the complex and costly divorce, support and custodial litigations in which so many single parents are involved.

<sup>12</sup> The problems faced by clients in relation to applying for welfare are documented in a recent study: Daniel Reich, *Applying for Public Assistance in New York City*. New York: Project Access, Department of Community Services, Community Service Society of New York, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ann Glendon, "The American Family in the 200th Year of the Republic," *Family Law Quarterly*, Vol. X, no. 4 (Winter 1977), p. 343.

### The Single-Parent Family as a Family in Transition

Noting the fact that one out of every five divorcees remarry in any given year, some have maintained that the single-parent family is a family in transition. For those who remarry, the mean duration between divorce and remarriage is a period of five to six years. Such a statistic is deceptive however, when we realize that the rate of remarriage is inversely proportional to the age of the mother and the number of children. In other words, the older the mother and the more children she has at the time of the divorce, separation or death of her spouse, the less likely she is to remarry. In general the rate of remarriage for widows tends to be very low. The possible hopefulness in the high remarriage rate of divorced mothers is offset by the distressing statistics indicating that forty percent of second marriages will end in divorce within several years. It is clear that for many families the single-parent stage is not "transitional."

#### Implications for the Jewish Community

The continuing increase in the divorce rate poses a serious threat to the core of the value system underlying Jewish communal life, *shalom bayit*, peace between husband and wife and harmony in the family. How to insure that harmony against the inroads of the tensions and erosions of values in American culture is one of the overriding tasks facing the Jewish community. It is obvious that efforts to this end must be directed at reinforcing our value system, at finding the means to insure sounder marital choices and at facilitating family harmony and strength early enough in the marriage to avert breakup. It is not our purpose here, however, to deal with that issue.

We are concerned with the after-math of that breakup, the single-parent family. What must be stressed is that divorce and family disharmony constitute this threat, not the efforts at rebuilding the family. In this sense I would not agree with Dr. Daniel Elezar's recent statement: "The single-parent families

weaken the Jewish family which is the one institution which never weakens in Jewish life." He comments that among his friends who have gone through this experience: "in every single case the level of Jewishness has gone down."<sup>14</sup> I do not know to what degree such a loss of identity is true for all children in one-parent families. Such a "loss of Jewishness" when it does occur, may be less a result of a lack of desire to continue such identity on the part of the parents than it is the outcome of other factors, such as lowered income or the attitude of the Jewish community towards such families.

It is of some significance to note the increased use of Jewish social services by such families after the breakup of their marriage. In this sense the Jewish social agencies, if they provide an experience that is genuinely Jewish, could be in a position to prevent the erosion from Judaism. It is of further interest to note the apparent increase in the utilization of Jewish day schools by single-parent families. While it is true that many such families send their children to day school as an alternate to child care, there is no doubt that in this way day schools are reaching broader segments of the population than they have ever done in the past. Single parents similarly have been responsive to programs with Jewish content when they have been offered. To what extent have our agencies, synagogues and other institutions welcomed these families? All too often our tendency has been to view the single-parent family as a "broken" family in need of repair. Many of us have rejected these families or cast doubt that they can be a viable continuing entity in Jewish communal life. Such attitudes can adversely affect the coping capacity of the single-parent family and may serve to discourage its efforts to connect with the Jewish community.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel J. Elezar, "The Jewish Community-Changing Patterns," *General Assembly Papers*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1976, p. 11 & 12.

### The Potential Strength of the Single-Parent Family

In the emphasis on the problems and needs of the single parent, we tend to overlook the very real strength which characterizes many such families. Most people who have worked with them have been impressed with the amount of effort they invest in sustaining their sense of family. In many of these families, despite the problems, there is a sense of unity and cohesiveness. We must remember, even though one spouse is absent, these are *families*. Despite the increase in divorce and separation, the number of Jewish children placed in full-time foster care or adoption has steadily diminished. In our analysis of the use of Federation agency services by single-parent families, they appear to have made greater use of services related to strengthening the family and sustaining children in their own homes.

#### Jewish Communal Attitudes About Single-Parent Families

Somehow we must break from the stereotype of the one-parent family as always broken, troubled and problematic without strength or resources. I marvel often at the courage of single parents with whom I have worked. To a degree the problems experienced by such families are generated by the attitudes and reactions of the society about them. We must face the fact that Jewish communal attitudes in this regard are no different from the general attitudes. It is true that our traditions are most solicitous about protecting the widows and providing for the orphan. Yet that same tradition tends also to view the widow as "damaged goods." The anomalous position of the Jewish woman in relation to Jewish divorce, the *get*, has been discussed at some length.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish woman separated from her husband, or even deserted by him,

<sup>15</sup> See particularly: Judith Lang: *Op Cit*. p. 2 & 3. Also Anne Lerner. "Who Has Not Made Me a Man, The Movement For Equal Rights for Women in American Jewry." New York: American Jewish Committee, January 1977.

has to face an even greater opprobrium, particularly when she is in the position of *aguna* where her husband is unwilling to grant her a divorce. In a sense, the woman-headed family faces rejection on many fronts, both from organized Jewish institutions as well as in the social life of the "married."

I wonder also how much of the problem of the single-parent family results from the Jewish communal attitude regarding the "mature" single woman, particularly when she is thrust into a position of responsibility. In this regard, Dr. Naomi Bluestone has commented: "There seems to be no place for a single woman over the age of 25 in Judaism as we know it today."<sup>16</sup> A change in communal attitude with an acceptance of the reality of the existence of the single-parent family could result both in the decrease in the inner family tensions and enable it to make the meaningful connections with Judaism. Relations with appropriate Jewish organizations could offset to a degree the lack of the father and husband in the family. The need to meet the single parent with compassion, acceptance and understanding rather than opprobrium constitutes the greatest challenge presented by the one-parent family to all Jewish organizations.

#### The Continued Primacy of the Family

Recognition of the potential strength of the one-parent family does not diminish my conviction regarding the centrality of the family to Jewish communal life nor the importance of continuing to provide those services which are necessary to strengthen it. Despite the buffeting the family has taken in modern society, it continues surprisingly to be strong. As I have noted previously: "The family is changing. Its forms and functions are being modified, but more crucial than it has even been is its central role in providing for continuity, for the basic experience of socialization of the individual, for establishing the matrix out of which later values are developed

<sup>16</sup> Naomi Bluestone, "Sunset, Sunset: The Life of Jewish Singles." *Moment*, September, 1976, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 25.

and for furnishing the consistent base for self-renewal in a changing world.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Mary Jo Bane, drawing on a broad range of data, declares: "The fact—as opposed to the myth—about marriage, child-rearing and family ties in the United States today provide convincing evidence that family commitments are likely to persist in our society. Family ties, it seems clear, are not archaic remnants of a disappearing traditionalism, but persisting manifestations of human needs for stability, continuity, and non-conditional affection.<sup>18</sup> Cumulatively, the evidence is strong that the family continues to be a central, thriving institution in national as well as in Jewish life.<sup>19</sup>

#### The Single-Parent Family As A Dynamic System

From this perspective, the one-parent family is seen as essentially a response within the family system to inner and external forces which have disrupted it. An understanding of the single-parent family and of its needs must rest on an awareness and comprehension of the dynamics of the family system. As a system, the family is made up of many components, including the marital relationship, the parent-child relationship, relationships among siblings, interactions with the extended family, and with the total community. It is also made up of many polarities, central to which is the need on the part of each

<sup>17</sup> Saul Hofstein, "The Critical Role of the Family in a Changing Society," *Dimensions*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Fall 1968), p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Mary J. Bane, *Here To Stay. American Families in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Bane Books, 1976.

<sup>19</sup> See particularly papers by Alice S. Rossi, Jerome Kagan and Tamara K. Hareven in the recent volume titled "The Family," *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (Spring 1977). See also General Mills, *American Family Report 1976-1977. Raising Children in a Changing Society*, Minneapolis: General Mills, Inc. 1977. The families in this study are those with children 13 years or younger.

member for individual fulfillment and self-realization posited against the requirement that each family member relinquish some part of his own individuality to preserve the whole. Changes in any part of the system have complex impacts upon all other aspects of the system. While departure of either spouse has profound effects upon the family it does not necessarily destroy it.

A pervasive quality of all systems is what has been called the tendency to closure. Stated simply, the various elements and processes within the family system respond to disruption so as to minimize its effect and enable the system to survive. Loss of a family member by death, desertion, separation or divorce very often is preceded by a period of dynamic tensions involving both disruptions and reorganization. During that process the family in effect has begun to prepare itself for the ultimate crisis and to effect closure once the disruption has occurred.

Following the actual break there occurs a period of reorganization or closure. Speaking specifically of divorce, Judith Lang notes that there is a "period of disequilibrium of approximately two years following the actual divorce." She describes the "cruel squeeze play" into which the divorced woman is plunged. "Women's liberation offers vistas of growth, 'creative divorce,' and personal happiness, when the reality is often a long period of loss and mourning, and societal rejection of the middle-aged woman in favor of youth and good looks."<sup>20</sup>

Bereavement similarly involves intricate process following the shock of the loss. The first phase involves shock and grief with initial protest and denial. That phase is followed by despair and disorganization. For many, there then occurs a process of reorganization, both within the individuals and within the family affected. All too often, the very period when the surviving spouse and children begin to reach out for communal involvement and

<sup>20</sup> Judith Lang, *Op Cit.*, p. 12.

acceptance, they meet overt rejection and isolation.<sup>21</sup>

#### Impact of Marital Disruption on Parent-Child Relationship

The mother-child relationship is one of the most complex and difficult relationships in human experience. While she invests deeply of herself through love and nurturing, she must prepare the child for ultimate separation and independence. Often, to sustain her role as mother and housewife, she has had to forego a career and self-realization within the broader social world. Even where she has opted to work, or had to because of circumstances, carrying such conflicting roles can generate guilt and conflict.

In a healthy two-parent family situation the marital relationship can bring much of the gratification which the mother needs to sustain her in her difficult task. The father can share in the rearing of the children also while providing a supportive, relieving role for the mother. In addition to providing for the masculine role model for the children, the father can play an important part through his support of the mother and also through the provision of a balance which can break into the intensity of the mother-child relationship.

The impact on a family of the father's leaving depends, in part, upon the extent to which he has carried this role. In many situations, it is precisely his failure to do so, his denial of responsibility as husband and father, which might lead the mother to move towards a divorce. In many cases also the husband, in effect, deserts the family because he does not want to commit himself to responsibility. Ironically, there are many situations where the father spends more time with the children after a divorce than when he was an integral part of the family. There are other situations where the father, unable to

<sup>21</sup> For a fuller discussion of bereavement see Norman Linzer, Ed., *Understanding Bereavement and Grief*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1977.

carry his commitment or responsibility within the marital situation, may have turned to the children for support and gratification. The father's leaving, whether on his own initiative or that of his wife, may and most often does have a negative impact on the lives of the children. There are some situations, however, in which the separation or divorce mark the beginning of the first period of peace and tranquility within the family and provide the opportunity for rebirth and growth.

The mother left without a husband is confronted with the dilemma as to where to find the support, recognition, gratification and renewal which she needs to carry her role effectively in the parent-child relationship. All too often, society fails to respond to this need. Much has already been written about the rejection by society of the mature single woman whatever the reason for her being single. Similarly, the singles world is not particularly geared to the mother of children who finds herself at a disadvantage because of the responsibility she must carry. The working single mother is caught in a bind between the demands of her job and the needs of her children, particularly during times of crisis.

It is little wonder that the General Mills report found that more singles than married mothers feel they do not spend enough time with their children, that they are not doing the right things in raising their children and that they are not doing as good a job with the children as their own parents had done. Single parents more than any other group were "most worried about the job they are doing raising their children."<sup>22</sup> Earlier studies have reported that formerly married women are more likely than married women to feel unhappy, to suffer from fears of being alone and from loss of self-esteem as a woman, and to lack self-confidence. Suicide rates have been found to be higher for widows than for married women. The rate of suicide among divorced women was found to be three times as high as for men and four times as high as for

<sup>22</sup> General Mills, *Op Cit.*, pp. 12 & 26.

married women.<sup>23</sup> Morton Kissen notes among separated women in his therapy group a particularly high incidence of depressive reactions, exaggerated dependency, regressive, narcissistic and psychopathic behavior, and a tendency to experience a recapitulation of childhood separation trauma.<sup>24</sup>

The single parent is often thrown back into a dependency relationship with her own parents, a relationship which for many has been fraught with difficulty and from which marriage had helped them to free themselves. The relationships with maternal parents and former in-laws often introduce added difficulties into the life of the single parent. These relationships may also burden the single parent with even greater guilt in her awareness that her own situation may interfere with her parents' freedom to live their own lives. On the other hand, her own parents' failure to respond to the single parent or to offer to assist her may leave her feeling even more isolated and rejected, thus adding to her burden of depression. Dr. Ruth Neuhauer says about relationships with relatives: "Women often have to deal with the feelings of the relatives on both sides. The family of the ex-husband may be antagonistic to her or may abandon her and the children completely. Her own parents may add to her emotional burden by feeling sorry for her and worrying about her future. It is not uncommon for a parent to say to a daughter, 'Before I die, I would like to see you happily married again.' Well meaning, and as understandable as this may be, it only makes the divorcee feel that she let her parents down too. Other parents feel that they have to resume the role of parents again and have to

watch out or check up on them."<sup>25</sup>

#### The Father in Single-Parent Families

Though still relatively low, and increasing at a lower rate than women, there is a growing group of father-headed, single-parent families. Courts appear to be awarding custody of children to fathers somewhat more frequently. Similarly, there has been a number of instances where mothers have deserted families or voluntarily left the children in the care of the father. While fathers confronted by the responsibility for caring alone for the children are frequently in a much more secure financial position than women in similar positions, they face from the outset critical problems in relation to planning for the care of the children as well as taking over the responsibility for maintenance of the home and the multitude of functions normally carried by the mother. One father reported having had ten different housekeepers during the three years since the death of his wife. In general, the nature of the problem for the father-headed, single-parent family is similar in many respects to that described for the mother-headed family.

In approximately nine out of ten cases the fathers are the "absent" parents. They have the difficult task of sustaining a relationship with their children through visits which take the children out of their natural setting. Too often fathers may be irregular or unpredictable in those visits. At times the absent father's role with the children may add further complications to the mother's life and her efforts to find a new balance in her relationship to the children. Having the children for brief visitations, the father can devote himself exclusively to them and often tends to over-indulge them. His pattern of permissiveness or discipline with the children may run counter to what the mother is trying to do with them all week. He may use the children to stir

disharmony and create difficulty when they return home. Since divorce and marital breakup leaves many residues of hostility and bitterness, it is often very difficult for divorced parents to reconcile their attitudes about the children.

#### Impact of Marital Breakup on Mother as Woman

We sometimes forget the mother in the single-parent family is a woman too with needs independent of the children who absorb so much of her energies and time. This need is poignantly expressed by a single parent, "You're married—a member of Society—you belong—a part of a whole family—a social being. And then one day your world explodes—your marriage breaks up and you enter the Single World. No longer are you a member of society. No longer are you part of the whole family unit, *but* you are still a social being. Friends rally around you and offer comfort and support to you but you soon discover you are on a totally different planet, completely alien to your married friends and so slowly you drift away from them and they from you. In a two-by-two world you are a freak—where do you fit in? . . . I seem to take two steps forward and one step backward. It's a continual struggle not to give up and wallow in my miserable loneliness."<sup>26</sup>

Even when the cycle of loneliness is broken and the single mother establishes a relationship with a man, she is confronted with new tensions in relation to her children who may have mixed feelings about her dating. On the one hand, they may be seeking a replacement for the father they lost and perhaps happy that the mother's needs for companionship may be met. On the other hand, they may have difficulty in giving up their fantasy that somehow the marriage may be restored, and their lost father returned. They may feel the boyfriend is an intruder or want to transform him into a "daddy." It is amazing how

puritanical children can be in relation to a single parent's behavior with the opposite sex. Such responses of children can complicate the course of a relationship and too often prevent it from maturing. The task of arranging appropriate sitting arrangements when the children are younger can be formidable, particularly where income is inadequate. Arranging for time for socializing can present serious difficulties. With older children, the single parent may be torn by the need to leave them without supervision during the time she may be working or socializing. It can require an acrobat's skill to juggle time to allow for work, socialization, housework, child-care and supervision of the children. That the mothers' fears regarding children's activities in their absence are not unfounded is confirmed in the finding of the General Mills study that children of working mothers are more likely to move in bad company than their peers whose mothers are home.<sup>27</sup>

#### Effects on Children of Dissolution & Breakup

A thorough discussion of the impact on children of the loss of a parent through death, separation or divorce would require many volumes. We have seen how vitally the children are involved in the phases preceding the departure of the parent as well as during the critical period following the dissolution of the marriage. The effects on the child's self depends on many variables including: individual personality, the point in his development where the break takes place, his ordinal position and the many environmental factors which influence him. Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner in testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth, stated: "Any force or circumstance which interferes with the formation, maintenance, or status, or continuing development of the parent-child system in turn jeopardizes the development of the child."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> General Mills, *Op Cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Testimony Before the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth," *American Families: Trends and Pressures, 1973*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Jane K. Burgess, "The Single-Parent Family. A Social and Sociological Problem," *The Family Coordinator*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April 1976), p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> Morton Kissen, "A Group Psychotherapy Approach to the Treatment of Separated Women." Jewish Community Services of L.I., New York (mimeo), pp. 4-7.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth Neuhauer, "Institute on Single-Parent Family," Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Commission on Synagogue Relations, 1974. (mimeo), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, "On Being Single," Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, Commission on Synagogue Relations, 1977. (mimeo).

No matter how carefully parents attempt to explain or involve the children, the impact of the breakup and its preceding conflicts can have a profoundly traumatic effect on them. Peter Neubauer, reviewing the literature regarding children affected by separation in the "oedipal" period (from 2-6 years of age) comments that the cases "cannot fail to impress upon us the pathogenic potential which an absent parent can exert on sexual identification and ego formation."<sup>29</sup> Other studies have shown that children of divorce are likely to have a lower sense of self-esteem and more psychosomatic problems than children of two-parent families.<sup>30</sup>

We must not assume that children are simply the inert "victims" of family disorganization. On the contrary, they are deeply involved participants who contribute both to the problems in the family and also to the process of reorganization. Following disruption, their position in the family may change and they may assume new responsibilities. The presence of children may provide the parent with a sense of purpose and a source of companionship which enable her to overcome the shock of loss or desertion. In their way, children can also disrupt the process of reorganization. Their anger and hurt at what feels to them as desertion, their unreadiness to accept the change or their desire to reinstitute the marriage may lead them to sabotage child-care efforts. As noted above they may feel guilty, and internalize the problem in the form of excess anxiety symptoms. Some children reflect their feelings in fear of the death of the remaining parent.

In contrast, many children respond positively making an effective contribution to the successful reorganization of the family. Jane

<sup>29</sup> Peter Neubauer, "Institute on the Single Parent Family," New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, Commission on Synagogue Relations, 1973. (mimeo), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Morris Rosenberg, "The Broken Family and Self Esteem," in Morris Rosenberg, Editor, *Society and the Adolescent Self Images*, New York: Princeton U. Press, 1965, pp. 85-106.

K. Burgess notes: "Although children may be hurt by a divorce or the loss of a parent by death, they often are able to become psychologically whole again in a very short time." She cites a number of studies which indicate serious questions regarding the popular notion that such children must necessarily have difficulty in developing their own sexual identity because of the lack of a "role model." Many clinicians would agree strongly with her statement, "There is substantial evidence that children are measurably better off living with one parent than are the children of unhappy homes characterized by bitterness, fighting, and physical and mental cruelty whose parents stay together for the children's sake."<sup>31</sup>

Excessive emphasis on the damage to children of marital breakup can intensify the problem for the remaining parent. Her fear of emotional damage to children can make it difficult for her to trust the genuine recuperative capacity of children and their natural striving towards health. We must remember that children in single-parent families undergo the same damaging tensions and influences in our culture which affect all children.<sup>32</sup> Single parents critically need assistance both in restoring their confidence in themselves as well as in developing a faith in the potential within their children for normal growth.

#### Community Services

In addition to its own regenerative processes, the single-parent family needs a variety of services to enable it to function effectively, to cope with psychological problems and find a place in the social setting. We are confronted with a dilemma in planning for such services. These services need to be specialized to reach a variety of single-parent families and provide help for the special problems confronting them. Yet, it is of critical importance for these families to achieve acceptance and integration in the total community. Specialized focused services which separate single parents from the

<sup>31</sup> Jane K. Burgess, *Op Cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>32</sup> See particularly, Bronfenbrenner, *Op Cit.*

mainstream tend to reinforce their difference and sense of isolation. We are challenged to find ways of meeting the needs of single-parent families which will not result in that.

Many of the problems faced by the single-parent family are common to all families in America. We have to work with other groups to develop national, state and local governmental policies which will strengthen the family and provide it with an income base sufficient for survival. Continued support of our family and treatment services is essential. We must find ways to reach out more to single-parent families and make our services better known, more relevant to their particular needs and more readily accessible.

We have noted the recurrent concern of single parents regarding their parenting role. Family life education with particular emphasis on early parenting can be of vital importance if it can be so presented and organized as not to exclude single parents or to create a greater amount of guilt and self-blame on their part. Such programs, too, should bring to the single parent ways in which to reinforce the Jewish component of family life and to use it to strengthen the identity of the children. For those children who lack a masculine adult to whom they can relate, the availability of a supervised Big Brother can be important.<sup>33</sup> Such services should be considerably expanded and made more accessible to all who need them.

A continuing and overriding need of the single parent, particularly for the over 50 percent who are working, is assistance with child-care through expansion of day-care, family day-care, nursery school and after school and summer programs. A study done in 1975 at New York Federation of child care\* resources indicated approximately 2,300

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Stark, "The Fatherless Boys Project of the Jewish Board of Guardians: Sane Therapeutic Implications." This Journal, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Winter 1976), pp. 201-207.

\* Exclusive of full-time foster care, residential treatment programs.

Jewish children were served. It was found that these services were insufficient, particularly to middle-class families. The cost of meeting fully the day care needs for this group is very high and probably beyond the capacity of private philanthropy. We must add our efforts to those pressing for legislation which would provide adequate day-care services. It is of interest to note how many single parents utilize summer day- and sleepaway-camp as a form of child-care.

All members of single-parent families have a need for a variety of socialization and educational experiences. Many of our Centers and "Ys" have been developing special programs for this group.<sup>34</sup> Collaborative programs bringing together Centers, family, vocational and other agencies can avoid duplication of services and facilitate the clients' use of those services.

While many single parents express the desire to remarry, we must be careful not to assume that the goal of social programs is simply to provide the opportunity to meet potential spouses. Most single parents want more than that. For many, the need to upgrade their level of income, to obtain additional education or embark on a career may be even more important. Obviously, this need calls for development or expansion of career guidance, job placement, help with educational planning and scholarships for further education.

For those mothers who would place the priority on remarriage, the lack of opportunities for meeting desirable men of the same faith has been an overwhelming problem. Various dating and mate-matching techniques, including the old *Shadchun* or marital bureau, have been tried. None of them has proved very satisfactory. It has been suggested that match-making on a professional level might

<sup>34</sup> See: Milton B. Pinck, *Newsletter*, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, Commission on Synagogue Relations. Report No. 14. May and June 1976. Also see Special Issue "Single-Parent Families," *Viewpoints*, 1974.



become an additional function of the family agency.<sup>35</sup>

In planning for the needs of single-parent families we must not assume everything must be provided for them. Single parents themselves have developed effective organizations, such as Parents Without Partners, which have done a magnificent job in helping these parents cope more effectively with their situation.<sup>36</sup> Our agencies must find ways of reinforcing such mutual efforts among the single parents themselves. If possible, self-help groups under Jewish auspices should be developed. We should establish relationships with such groups to provide back-up services as well as more specialized professional services. Coordination and emphasis on standards are necessary to insure the most effective and economical program of services. In an area where there are such gaps in service needless duplication should be avoided.

Such social services must be closely integrated with efforts by synagogues and other Jewish organizations to involve single-parent families and enable them to relate to the Jewish community. It is particularly important for the children to be able to obtain the necessary education and experience for developing a sound Jewish identity. Many synagogues are already re-examining their dues structures and membership requirements in order to make it possible for single-parent families to remain with or to join the congregations. It is essential to reach out to single-parent families to make Judaism more meaningful to them and to provide them with

means of maintaining their connections. Such an effort can be one means of breaking through the recurrent feeling of isolation so common to this group. For the children, the sense of Jewish identity, strengthened by participation in Jewish activities could provide an ego-enhancing element helpful to them in achieving healthy, normal maturity.

#### Conclusion

We can reiterate that the single-parent family is a significant component of Jewish communal life, resulting primarily from an increasing rate of divorce. While reaffirming the centrality of the two-parent family for Jewish continuity, we see the single-parent family as an effort to sustain family life despite the disruption of the marital relationship. In this sense, the community must learn to accept and to make a place for the single parent and her children and provide them with sufficient support and assistance to enable them to cope effectively. To accomplish this task will involve relinquishing stereotypes and overcoming negative attitudes. Existing services must be made more accessible and new services developed to meet the special needs of the single parent. Such services should be integrated insofar as possible with general services available to the total community. Of paramount importance to the single-parent family are those services which will make it more secure economically, which will sustain the children while the mother is working and will help both parent and children to become more integrated into the Jewish community. While the single-parent families present a challenge to the Jewish community, they represent a potential strength. We must respond to their ever-continuing efforts to continue as families and their reaching out to the Jewish community for the assistance they so desperately need in their period of crisis.

<sup>35</sup> Elsa A. Solender, "Matchmaker, Matchmaker Where Are You Now That We Need You," *Jewish Digest*, June 1977, pp. 7-10.

<sup>36</sup> See particularly, Patricia C. Clayton, "Meeting the Needs of the Single Parent," *Family Coordinator*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (October 1971), pp. 327-37.

## The Survivor As A Parent

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*... a forum needs to be set up to enable the two generations to talk to one another. Only by exchanging their thoughts will they learn one another's pain. Only through this exchange and dialogue can the children free themselves from guilt and work toward a healthy separation. In order to separate truly, permission needs to be given by the parents.*

For a long time I was obsessed by the idea of what is happening to our children. By ours I mean not only mine and my husband's, but children of a group of people called Survivors.

Scarred as we are, how are we perpetuating our trauma? Then I read a short article in *Time* entitled *Legacy of Terror*.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Davidson, an Israeli psychiatrist, was quoted as saying that many Jews who survived the war were scarred for life by "survivor syndrome." They, in turn, according to Dr. Davidson, have transmitted much of this to their children and grandchildren.

Shortly afterward, I came across many articles and books all testifying to Dr. Davidson's findings.

I was greatly moved by an article in *The New York Times Magazine*<sup>2</sup> written by Helen Epstein, entitled "Heirs of the Holocaust—The Lingering Legacy for Children of Survivors." As I read it I was convinced more than ever before of the need for a dialogue between the survivors and their children.

My interest in this area is twofold. First it is personal. Both I and my husband are survivors. We lived with our families in the Warsaw Ghetto from the beginning. We escaped through the sewers on the second night of the ghetto uprising. Secondly, it is professional. I am a caseworker working for a number of years at the Jewish Family and Community Service in the northwest suburb of Chicago.

Ours is a large, middle-class Jewish community, recently in the news because of the attempted Nazi march.

<sup>1</sup> *Time*, February 21, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, June 19, 1977.

For this and many other reasons the spotlight now again is on the Holocaust and the main actors are our children.

Learning that there was a group of the children of survivors meeting in our area, I discussed the possibility of extending it to include their parents with its leader. The man in charge was strongly disapproving of my suggestion. His answer was short but firm, "absolutely no," he said, "this would be dynamite."

This statement puzzled me. After all, these young people have lived with their parents under one roof with presumably some sort of communication between them. Why, then, would an open dialogue in a non-threatening, benign situation with two trained group leaders be so threatening? I wondered what his fantasy was.

We talked briefly about the denial and other issues that the children of survivors are struggling with. I wondered what was his intended goal for the rap group. He felt that groups like these could free these young people from guilt and from their parents' hang-ups.

This seems to be the belief of many people. I, for one, must protest. And because I feel so strongly about it, this article is being written. Much of what I have to say needs to be substantiated, many in-depth interviews with parents and children need to be conducted. At this time my statements are based on experiences of a few, some of my clients, some of my friends and acquaintances and, of course, my family.

I have always been bothered by generalizations. I do realize that they have to be made. They simplify life and are of some value. Yet,