

ED296123 1988-00-00 Single Parents: Career-Related Issues and Needs. ERIC Digest No. 75.

ERIC Development Team

www.eric.ed.gov

Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

| | |
|--|---|
| Single Parents: Career-Related Issues and Needs. ERIC Digest No. 75..... | 1 |
|--|---|



ERIC Identifier: ED296123

Publication Date: 1988-00-00

Author: Kerka, Sandra

Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education Columbus OH.

Single Parents: Career-Related Issues and Needs. ERIC Digest No. 75.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

TEXT: Today, 1 of every 4 families with children under the age of 18 is a single-parent family, up from 1 of every 10 in 1970. Nearly 60 percent of all children born in 1986 may spend 1 year or longer in a single-parent family before reaching age 18 (Norton and Glick, 1986). Clearly a growing phenomenon, the single-parent family is often subject to extreme economic problems: single parents need special assistance with career development and vocational preparation. This digest explores the nature of single parenthood and the special preemployment and employment needs of distinct types of single-parent families, highlighting the characteristics of effective career development

programs to meet those needs.

THE NATURE OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD

Single parents commonly experience difficulties with role identity. Some social stigma is still attached to single-parent status, regardless of how it was acquired. For single mothers, development of positive role identity is often hampered by their inability to support their families financially. Single parents often experience role strain from attempting to balance wage-earner and parental responsibilities.

Lack of formal education and consequently of job skills limits access to occupations that provide enough income for an acceptable standard of living. Women are additionally hindered by socialization into traditionally female occupations that are low paying, perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Burge, 1987).

Poverty is persistently linked with single-parent households, especially those headed by women. Such families are the poorest of all major demographic groups in the United States (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986). Wage differences between men and women arising from lack of labor and market preparation or experience or from discrimination, reinforce low-income status.

Although child care is an issue for all parents, an overwhelming number of single parents cannot afford high-quality day care--a major barrier to attending career development and skills training programs as well as to maintaining employment.

Among the solutions to these problems are changes in public policy and public attitudes toward single-parent families and more adequate financial support and child-care systems. Another key is career development--in addition to employment and economic security, career education can improve the physical and emotional well-being of participants (Burge, 1987).

TYPES OF SINGLE PARENTS

The vast majority of single-parent families are low-income families consisting of a mother and her young children, characterized by a high percentage of minority representation and relatively little formal education. Three major subgroups of one-parent families have also been identified: displaced homemakers, adolescent mothers, and single fathers (Burge, 1987).

DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS

Marital dissolution drastically reduces the new single-parent family's available income. Displaced homemakers are at an additional disadvantage because they often have little or no employment history, obsolete training or skills, low self-esteem, and external locus of control.

ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

Each year in the United States, 1 in 10 teenage girls becomes pregnant. This vast subgroup of single parents faces many obstacles to self-sufficiency, such as lack of education, job readiness, and emotional maturity. Their crucial need to complete their education and achieve employment goals is complicated by their immediate needs for food, housing, child care, and emotional support (Time for Transition, 1985).

SINGLE FATHERS

Although they generally have a more healthy economic status than their female counterparts, single fathers often find their sole child-rearing role conflicting with work expectations. They also find themselves filling social roles for which they are not prepared.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF SINGLE PARENTS

As the sole support of their families, single parents are concerned with obtaining a good job and achieving economic independence. However, job training and job placement can be effective in the long run only if other needs are also addressed. Program developers should consider the following needs:

- Emotional support (counseling, peer groups, assistance with developing support systems)
- Job-seeking skills
- Basic skills instruction (especially literacy skills)
- Outreach and recruitment
- Child care
- Analysis of the role of gender in occupational choice
- Self-concept building
- Skills assessment
- The challenges of combining work and family roles
- Nontraditional job skills
- Parenthood education

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Meeting the needs of the many types of one-parent families is a major social challenge. Program developers must offer a full range of services, from occupational exploration to job search assistance. Following are some examples of types of career development programs for single parents (Burge, 1987).

HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Pregnant teens and teen parents are special targets for dropout prevention. Effective programs should include basic skills as well as occupational preparation, accurate information and guidance related to sexuality and family planning, prenatal and family life instruction, and support networks of teachers and peers who can assist with low self-esteem, time and stress management, and long- and short-term goal setting. Pregnant teens and teen parents can participate in alternative high school programs or be mainstreamed in regular classrooms.

ESTABLISHED EDUCATION SITES

Many single parents may feel more comfortable in the adult education atmosphere provided in area vocational centers and community colleges. These established sites already offer such services as basic literacy instruction, personal and career counseling, assistance for reentry students, and job placement. Child-care centers at these sites would overcome one of the major barriers for single parents returning to school.

NETWORKS AND NEWSLETTERS

Single parents frequently do not use the resources available to them, due to the extensive time and effort needed to locate resources or to discouraging past experiences (Time for Transition, 1985). Support and referral networks can help single parents identify community agencies that offer assistance with legal problems, health care, emergency funds, housing, shelter and protection, substance abuse, and other matters. Such networks can also provide advice on determining eligibility, meeting requirements, and negotiating for services with these agencies.

Newsletters are an inexpensive strategy for communicating with, educating, and supporting single parents. They can be used to supplement both group or individual career development activities. Work, homemaking, and child care demands often cause problems with attendance at formal programs, making newsletters an effective outreach technique.

FEDERALLY FUNDED PROGRAMS

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act emphasizes support of increased vocational education opportunities for displaced homemakers and single parents, among other groups. Many sites in Florida have used Perkins Act funding for projects ranging from balancing family life, education, and employment to increasing awareness

of nontraditional careers, achieving business ownership, and assisting with day care and sick child care. (The ERIC database contains descriptions of many Florida programs. See ED 285 039-049 and ED 285 988-999.)

Title II-A of the Job Training Partnership Act provides assistance to persons who have experienced barriers to employment, including displaced homemakers, single heads of household, and teenage parents. Funding for support services can be used for child care to increase participation. In addition, the 6 percent set-aside provides incentive grants for serving the special needs of these groups.

POLICY CONCERNS

In addition to developing effective programs, career educators can be advocates for public policy designed to assist single parents. Policy changes are needed in the areas of employment discrimination, recognition of nontraditional roles, government and employer support of child care, pay equity, social services for potential teen single parents, and work environment alternatives. In short, policies that establish an equitable educational and economic climate for both sexes and all ethnic groups as well as recognition of single-parent families as a viable family form will benefit not only these families but society as a whole.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Burge, Penny L. CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF SINGLE PARENTS. Information Series no. 324. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career, and Vocational Education. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education. The Ohio State University, 1987. ED 290 934.

Garfinkel, Irwin, and Sara S. McLanahan. SINGLE MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: A NEW AMERICAN DILEMMA. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1986.

Norton, A. J., and P. C. Glick. "One Parent Families: A Social and Economic Profile." FAMILY RELATIONS 35 (1986): 9-17.

Time for Transition. TEENAGE PARENTS AND EMPLOYMENT. New York, NY: National Child Labor Committee, 1985. ED 282 096.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under OERI contract. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

—

Title: Single Parents: Career-Related Issues and Needs. ERIC Digest No. 75.
Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);
Descriptors: Career Development, Career Education, Displaced Homemakers, Dropout Prevention, Early Parenthood, Educational Needs, Fathers, Federal Legislation, Federal Programs, Information Dissemination, Information Networks, One Parent Family, Public Policy
Identifiers: ERIC Digests

###



[\[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page\]](#)