

## Study on Single Parent Family Teenagers' Educational Problems and Social Worker Intervention

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### Abstract

It is very common in single parent families that various problems occurred, for example, improper educational methods used by family members and lack of guarantee of teenagers' legal rights and so on. Therefore, teenagers from single parent families need a lot of help from the society. Social work has great professional advantages in helping single parent family teenagers and resolving educational problems of them. This paper analyzes problems occurred during social worker intervening in single parent family teenagers' educational problems by exploring existing issues and basic social work theories as well as combining China's social work practice in single parent family teenagers educational problems. This paper also investigates some practical and applicable methods for resolving problems found during the study.

**Key words:** Single parent family; Social work; Intervention methods; Single parent family teenagers' education

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### 1. CURRENT PROBLEMS IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILY TEENAGERS' EDUCATION

From the perspective of sociology, single parent family is a special type of families. It is a combined living style

with only mother and children or father and children. That is to say, in a family, children only live with either their mother or their father but not both of them. In China, most single parent families are of the divorced type which counts 65.7% and the second is the ones that one of the parents dies which counts 25.23%. Because single parent family has lost complete family structure, children from this kind of families are mostly in very terrible educational environment which has made these children have lots of problems in their education.

#### 1.1 Single Parent Families Cannot Afford Proper Environment for Children's Normal Socialization

Socialization is a very important concept in sociology. It is a process that a person transferring from nature human being into a social individual. During the process, everyone has to internalize social behavior standards into one's own behavior standards through various kinds of means and after all form one's own value and behavior standards. Family is the first significant places for children to socialization since children have to study how to accommodate themselves into the society and how to handle human relationship from their parents. Therefore, families lacking of father or mother is not able to provide appropriate environment for children's normal socialization.

#### 1.2 Pamper Spoil

Single parent family fathers or mothers usually spoil children more than ordinary family parents. Mostly, in order to remedy children's regret in lacking of father or mother, they will meet children's different types of requirements without thinking about whether these requirements are proper. However, most times, the consequences are the opposite. This kind of conduct made by fathers or mothers from single parent families will lead to selfishness and self-centered thoughts for children. Children will think that everyone owns them and of course they deserve the best which will definitely make them lack of sympathy and respect.

### 1.3 Simple or Rude Educational Methods

Some single parent family fathers or mothers educate their children depending on their mood; some even treat their children as punching bags. Children from this kind of families are always living under terrible circumstance which can restrain children's individual development and shape weak-headed characters.

### 1.4 Too Much Pressure for Children

Many divorced single parent family fathers or mothers try hard to prove that they can cultivate their children even by oneself and thus bring too much pressure to their children. Especially in school study, some father or mother has very high requirements for their children. They need their children to be superior to others which on contrary gives too much pressure to make children do against them.

### 1.5 Negligence in Taking Responsibilities

Single parent family father or mother takes the responsibilities in cultivating children. They have to be a good mother as well as a good father. They need to burden heavy house work and also loads of jobs outside the family which always make them tired and do not have any spare efforts for their children's living and education. Under such circumstance, many of these parents just let children living their own way without caring about them or showing any responsibilities upon them. Definitely, children will feel lonely, self-abased, instable in mood, changeable, and show no concern on others consequently.

Due to the worse environment of family socialization, many children cannot adapt to the society well and crime rate of children is rising. In recent years, there are even more mental problems occurred among single-parent family children. For example, depression. Lack of father or mother will make children unhappy and have bad temper, if bad temper lasts for a long time, it will easily generates certain depression. There is also another circumstance like mania. When children live without mother or father and do not have other means to abreact, they will show mania and are very possible to fight with other people. There are also some problems existing among single parent families. E.g. when the family does not have stable income or just has low income, one of the parents refuse to pay the cost of upbringing, or shirk responsibilities in bringing up children, etc.. These problems are all possible reasons for children to generate inferiority complex.

## 2. CURRENT SITUATION OF SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILY AND ITS PROBLEMS

**Case:** CHENG Dong (a made up name) is a grade three pupil in city A. His father died when he was nine just enrolling in school for about one month. His mother who

takes the responsibility of supporting the family has been working in a private company. Ever since lost his father, CHENG Dong has been performing badly in both school and family and also become the most focused naughty child for the teacher.

**Behavior:** He has been very emotional and easy to be stirred; has bad self-control ability; aggressive in conducting; but will apologize for what he did.

**Human relations:** He cannot get along with other students harmoniously and sometimes conflict with others which have made him repelled.

**Traumatic experiences:** He thinks that his father's death is the most important thing ever happened in his life. He usually dreamt about his father and always thought about his father, especially when he is at home alone. He refuses to talk about his father with others.

**Study:** His study records rate lower middle; have bad hand writing; He thinks that the pressure from school is too much and hates studying.

All income of CHENG Dong's family comes from his mother's 1200 RMB per month. He and his mother can barely have any money left after paying every month's mortgage for the house and basic living expense. He usually helps his mother clean the house and do some cooking. However, He always makes his mother headache about his performance in school. He and his mother hardly ever go out have some activities. CHENG Dong's mother has to work and at the same time bring up him so there is not too much time and energy for her to cultivating and supervising child. The death of CHENG Dong's father has caused certain emotional disturbance and mental pressure for both him and his mother. Besides, CHENG Dong's mother has always been telling him not to talk about his father's death in front of other people (HE, 2002).

From the case above, it can be concluded that the family referred has the following problems: (1) CHENG Dong himself. CHENG Dong himself has certain behavior bias and tensions in human relations. (2) CHENG Dong's mother. The income of her is too low. Her is down in spirits and cannot face reality.

In this case, social workers have adopted behavior therapy and sorrow treatment. Detailed methods are: social workers work for CHENG Dong's case as case study. After five meetings with CHENG Dong, social workers gradually generate relation with him and amending his attacking mood and other bias behaviors and tensions in human relations step by step. With the agreement of CHENG Dong's mother, the social workers start sorrow treatment for him. Social workers help CHENG Dong's mother recall her husband so that to cure her problem in facing reality. When finishing the case, the attacking behavior of CHENG Dong has been improved and he can also handle his own moods and human relations in certain degree. CHENG Dong's mother's spirits have also been finer than before.

Social workers intervention in single parent family teenagers' educational problems is divided in three aspects: (1) aiming at teenagers themselves. Mainly is social service regarding problems of single parent family teenagers themselves. (2) Services for single parent family teenagers' environment. Single parent family teenagers' problems have some connection with their living environment. Social works can do certain related work regarding teenagers' parents, schools, and the society. (3) Services for single parent family teenagers and communication with environment. Social workers can do social work through teenagers, communities, and schools to cure problems of single parent family teenagers.

In this case, social workers adopted case work method to open their work separately for CHENG Dong and his mother. Pointing at different problems they have, social workers give different remedy means which is a positive aspect. However, there are still some questions during social workers' work: (1) they ignore the interaction between CHENG Dong and environment. Human behaviors have great connection with environment. Social workers do not have CHENG Dong and his community staff and teachers to communicate in order to cure problems of him. In addition, social workers do not combine CHENG Dong's problems with his mother's while both of their problems have the same origin that is the death of CHENG Dong's father. (2) they ignore opening related activities in CHENG Dong's school and community. The environment that CHENG Dong lives in is not merely family but also school and the community. It is a rather large negligence for social workers. (3) they ignore the life remedy for this family.

The problems exposed by this case in social workers intervention in single parent family educational problems are typical but there are also some other problems as follows:

### **2.1 Social Work Barely Intervenes in Single Parent Family Educational Problems**

By the end of 2011, Tianjin Women and children foundation did a survey called "Survey of Tianjin single parent family living status and requirements" in 18 districts and towns in Tianjin in order to get comprehensive understanding about the single parent family situation in Tianjin and their remedies. As the result shows, there are only community organizations, women's federation, and government organizations offering remedies for single parent families but no social work organizations. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. One is that China's social work starts late than other countries and the social work system is not complete. Second is the public lack of knowledge about social work. Third is that the social workers' team is rather small. In Hong Kong, about one out of 1000 people are social workers. However, in mainland China, the average

number of social workers is far behind this standard. There is a huge gap in social workers.

### **2.2 The Government Does Not Include Social Work Intervention in Single Parent Family Education into Social Relief System**

The government does not include social work intervention in single parent family education into social relief system and social workers lack of legality when offering services. Aiming at single parent family, China's social relief work mainly includes three parts. a. regular social remedies which are basically subsistence allowances for both urban and rural residents, urban and rural medical assistance and other special remedies. b. contemporary remedies which are used for low income people. c. cultivate and develop public welfare non-government organizations by supporting development of charities and propose mutual help between single parent families. From the above we can see, there is no social work organization in the governmental single parent family relief system in China. Most city's governments do not include social work in their single parent family remedy system or either cooperate initiatively with social work stations, barely any support in finance. These all have made social work have many problems and difficulties which is not good for opening social work organizations and social workers' work. In addition, social work's position in the governmental relief system is not clear yet, especially there are some governmental organizations and officials lack of knowledge on social work. These are also reasons that the legality of social work is not strong enough in China.

### **2.3 Deficiency in Service Standards**

From the perspective of social work profession, single parent family social work is a relative new field and most social workers do not have rich experience upon these cases which has made social workers lack of unified service standards and regulations. Besides, many social work organizations do not have supervision and evaluation, especially the outsiders' fixed period evaluations.

### **2.4 Pay too Much Attention on Current Problems' Prevention and Resolution in Single Parent Family Education but Lack of Development**

Social work has played very well in helping recover social relations, heart comforting, and adapting new circumstances. However, the function that helps improve its community ability and helps cultivate long-term development for single parent families is obviously not enough. Take the above case as example, social workers applied different methods on CHENG Dong and his mother and both of them have gained certain effect. But social workers did not resolve the problem of his mother's low income which has led many other questions in the family.

### 3. COUNTERMEASURES FOR SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILY EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

#### 3.1 Government Should Pay More Attention on Social Work Education and Publicity

In Guangdong province of China, social work has been developed the fastest. There were several social work propaganda weeks held by the government recently, for example, Shenzhen's social work propaganda weeks and Guangzhou's social work propaganda weeks. There are even more small scale social work propaganda activities. Social work propaganda can help the public know their work in a proper way which is a very important base for social workers intervention in most single parent families. Therefore, different regions can propagandize social work according to their own situations. The government needs to increase input for social work education. The strengthening of social work team is also a very important foundation for bringing more social workers to intervene into single parent family educational problems.

#### 3.2 Include Social Workers' Remedies on Single Parent Family Education into National Social Relief System

We need to fully understand the significance of social work intervention in single parent family teenagers' education and try our best to strengthen single parent family teenagers' education social work systematic construction and guarantee its legality. Governments should include social work officially into single parent family teenagers education and relief system so that to create a single parent family teenagers' education and relief system under which the government is the leader, social work organizations are the main subjects, and social services are the subsidies. Related departments should also carry out some policies and regulations to develop social workers positions and make sure social workers' position, character, and rights in single parent family teenagers' education.

#### 3.3 Promulgate Various Service Standards and Regulations to Actually Improve Service Level of Social Work in Single Parent Family Teenagers

It is highly requested to allow full play of central and local social work associations' function, organize specialist who

have profound theoretical knowledge and practitioners who have rich practical experiences, based on every family member's problems in single parent families, the environment on which problems generated, and interaction problems between single parent families and the environment, provide social work service standards and regulations upon single parent family teenagers' educational problems, and thus to offer better guidance on single parent family teenagers' education and social work services. On the grounds of service standards and regulations, cultivate a lot of social workers who can do supervision work. At the same time, carry out internal and external evaluation on social work organizations to guarantee service quality.

#### 3.4 Pay Great Attention on Single Parent Family Living Problems

Many single parent families have low income problems which is not only the origin of many problems in single parent family teenagers' problems but also many other family problems'. Accordingly, resolving single parent family living problems has become one of the most important bases for doing single parent family teenagers' social work. The government should resolve single parent family living problems through "government relief plus community help and working guidance" mode. Government give life relief to single parent families based on detailed understanding of them and meanwhile the community has to give necessary life assistance. Social workers or other social organizations can coordinate with other social resources and try their best to help single parent family employment problems.

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