

One parent families

This report is designed to achieve the following aims:

- 1/ the de-construction of the concept of risk as it is applied to this category
- 2/ an analysis of the socio-economic reality lying behind the category
- 3/ an analysis of the provision by the welfare state to counter the risks of children not receiving primary care.
- 4/ to reflect the data obtained in the survey as well as the reality of the people involved and their strategies, and to offer a definition of risk as risk of impoverishment: economic, social and educational.
- 5/ with this definition, to interpret the strategies of our interviewees

1. Lone-Parent Families and Changes in Family Structure

The weakness of the category label 'lone parent family' is that it lumps together both a group and a risk, (A.Pitrou, 1994). Strictly speaking a one parent family doesn't exist, because every child has two parents, rather one must speak of one parent households (N.Lefaucheur, 1988). The English term itself, 'lone parent family', as well as the French equivalent 'famille monoparentale' or 'monoparentalité' raises the question of the ambiguity of meaning in the term 'family'. 'Family' refers to kinship, but also, in common use, and in history, it refers to the household or the home¹. This ambiguity has not come about by chance. In fact one can argue, based on the work of many historians and sociologists, that the category 'lone-parent family' is only one of the many symptoms of the dramatic changes in the larger sphere of family and kinship that have occurred throughout the post-war period, shown clearly in social policy and general attitudes.

The category began to be recognized in France in the 70's and became an official category of the census in 1981 after having been recognized in the family policy enactments of 1976 which instituted a special lone-parent benefit -API²). The recognition of the category was influenced by practice in the UK, where it had been introduced in the middle sixties, and was brought about in France under pressure from sociologists, especially women sociologists, and feminists, such as Andrée Michel and Nadine Lefaucheur³. Their aim was to end injustice and

¹ The shift from kinship to home is in that sense clearly related to the rise of nuclear family. But it shall be recalled, for France at least, that nuclear family is not a recent phenomena. Historians have shown that three patterns of family (home) already existed as far as in the 17th : nuclear, large-authoritarian (patriarcal) and large-egalitarian. See H.Le Bras et E.Todd (1980).

² Allocation de parent isolé (1976)

³ The turning point is 1978 in the reprint of Andrée Michel's book, Sociologie de la famille et du mariage, Paris, PUF, where she uses the word "famille monoparentale" (which was not in the original print). See N.Lefaucheur, 1985.

to support the emancipation of women by fighting the stigmatisation and poverty to which large numbers of women raising children without the presence of the father were subjected. There was however a large difference in treatment between different groups of lone mothers: widows (war-widows notably) were celebrated, but divorced, often poor, single mothers were stigmatised; the most stigmatised group of all was that of; single, poor mothers, usually working-class or from other deprived groups - whether they had been deserted during an unwanted pregnancy⁴., or whether they had chosen, often for political reasons, to give birth and raise children without marrying or entering into conjugal life. However 'monoparentalité' was a category which lumped together all these different situations for the purposes of developing social policy and fighting discrimination.

What happened, as sociologists readily admit, was that the whole category was stereotyped in terms of the most stigmatised group, the image being of the young, inactive, deprived, unwillingly-pregnant woman abandoned by a man into misery. While such cases (as we'll see below), may exist they are very far from being the majority. In fact both social workers and social policy makers have been important contributors to the reinforcement of a negative stereotype by emphasizing the risks associated with one parent families often expressed in psychological terms. They include: loneliness, immorality, broken-homes, whole populations at risk (deserted children, incest), welfare-addiction, poverty, school failure, etc. 'Monoparentalité' is regarded as a risk in itself. The whole issue of single- motherhood is peculiarly contentious (A.M.Trekker, 1972) involving as it does the feminist movement and the condition of working class women. The prejudice influences even those writers who try to give a more balanced account of the lives of those single mothers who chose to be alone (like D.Frisher, 1979). Because there is no father in the daily family life, the child's life is always, systematically, described as unhappy and deprived.. Stigmatisation is also very marked at school. It has been shown (E.Burguiere, 1984) that teachers attribute school failure to family break-up; however, when asked to indicate which children in their classrooms fell into this category they only nominated children belonging to working class or deprived groups. Yet in the C.Neyrand and C.Guillot's survey(1988), no significant differences in school performances were found between a group of children belonging to one-parent households and the general population of children at school. School performances depends on the socio-cultural level of the parents, whether married, unmarried, in a conjugal set-up, single, etc. nevertheless 'monoparentalité' appears as an additional handicap among the very deprived households.

It is necessary to link this stigmatisation to the larger sphere of change in the family. One could hypothesize that stigmatisation is the price paid, ('le salaire de la peur'), for women's emancipation. The fear of the father's role vanishing, is not only manifest in violent, male attempts to hinder women's emancipation, (as shown, for instance, by the very long and intense debate about contraception and abortion both before and after a law has been passed, and similarly in the case of divorce.. The debate can be seen in a number of books: E.Sullerot (1992) argues against welfare support for women, that will lead to the disappearance of the male's responsibility. The radical feminist E.Badinter (1990) mocks the 'new fathers' and the 'wimpish male' replacing the traditional male and father figures. N.Aubert and V.DeGaullejac (1990) worry about the rise of a mother-centered society.

The lone-parent family category has been created and implemented during a very particular epoch and it in turn is being superseded by yet greater changes in family life and society. Cohabitation (instead of marriage), and illegitimate children, are not new phenomena

⁴ Abortion and contraception laws are from 1974, but are far from being widespread in society.

(anymore than lone-parent households are), but these categories have gained new members, less deprived and more easily accepted. Divorce is widespread, responding to the lengthening of the life-span and to the widespread concept of marriage solely in terms of a love-relationship (in other words 'le mariage bourgeois' has become the norm). The law itself has acknowledged these changes in family structure through some very important reforms: equality between illegitimate and legitimate children in 1982; shared parental authority between unmarried partners in 1987; and the forthcoming institution of a new contract ('contrat d'union civile') between two persons, whether male or female, heterosexual or homosexual; this is a contract which is different from the traditional marriage contract in the sense that it recognises a union without any sexual or reproductive prescription; it can be a union between two friends, brother and sister - anyone may decide to draw up a contract for their own purposes.

Despite all these changes, the model of the two-parents household, of education for two-parenthood, and in the end of the family as sacrosanct remains powerful particularly, as we shall see, in working class and deprived groups. In adapting to these changes and yet at the same time maintaining the model of a the two-parent family as the norm, judges' strategies in divorces involving children have been aimed at maintaining, by any means, links between the parents after divorce in such a way that it can be said that (I.Théry, 1994): divorce allows you to separate from the husband (or the wife) but not from the father (or the mother). If you marry, even for a short time, if you have children, it is a union for life. In other words, the law, following custom, distinguishes and separates the conjugal link from the parental link, (the husband from the father, the wife from the mother), that were joined by marriage.

Subsequently in France, as in other countries, like the USA, the lone-parent family model has been joined by new models of mixed, second, bi-nuclear, reconstituted or step-families⁵ (I.Théry, 1988). No less than 16% of American children live in this kind of family. We have no precise estimate yet for France because the reconstituted family is not a statistical or legal category. In fact it covers a wide range of situations including those that are already taken care of and managed to-day, through legal and social fiscal, and statistical means, as lone-parent family situations. I.Théry in fact accounted for 24 different patterns of reconstituted families depending on whether in the household :

- Children are from the first union by the mother
- " " father
- " " both
- There are or no children of the new union
- Both 'parents' have children elsewhere
- One of them has children elsewhere.
- Neither of them has children elsewhere.

Despite this, she claims, the ghost of the former husband will still hang over the single mother, even while he is blamed for being absent⁶. The Cinderella myth (jealousy of the new partner) and the Phedra myth (incest with the new partner) also haunt the lone-parent family.

⁵ We shall use the term reconstituted family. Stepfamily, as noticed (I.Théry, 1988) is coming from "steop", old English word for "orphan", therefore contaminated yet by the norm of the two parent household.

⁶ Neither can it be argued that men would be victims of judges discrimination in divorce regarding the status of children. When they ask to become the child's protector, this function is given to them in 60% of the case, but only 20% of men are asking for it (Insee, 1994).

In summary then we believe it is very important, before reviewing the strategies of our interviewees, to accept that 'monoparentalité' is not in itself a risk. Among others N.Lefaucheur (1988)'s work shows in particular that, if poverty in one-parent households is higher relative to two parent households (see below), it does not mean necessarily that 'monoparentalité' is the cause of poverty. Poverty results from the vulnerable situation of a certain number of women, before, during and after the break-up of a union, arising from their weak situation in the labour market, the housing market and/or the marriage market, because of gender, age, qualification, energy and time spent in conjugal life, and the organisation of welfare, law, etc. Consequently 'monoparentalité' in itself is not a risk. The risk experienced by these women has to be changed through the establishment of women's rights, employment and anti-poverty policies (N.Lefaucheur, 1988). If 'monoparentalité' is not a risk, what then is the risk faced by lone-parent households ? To approach this question we analyse the socio-economic reality covered by the category.

2/ The Lone-Parent Family from a Socio-Economic Perspective

It is easy to collect data on this population since it is, as in most of European countries, a statistical category of the census (The most recent figures are in Insee, 1994). For the purposes of the census, a lone-parent household is defined as a household in which a parent without a partner lives with one or several children aged under 25, the latter being single without partner or child. The total number in that census was 1.601.704 households, that is 1 in every 8 households with children, or 13,2%. They account for 11,2% of the children, the average number of children by household (1,6) being lower than in conjugal households (1,9). These figures locate France near the medium range for Europe, far behind Sweden or Denmark, but far ahead of Italy or Spain. Clearly with respect to this category there is in Europe a north-south divide⁷.

As already suggested, it is not a new phenomena. Common in the working class of the 19th century, it is not simply an ideological construction of the 70's. Lone-parent families (without the category) accounted for 9,3% of the households in 1968 and even 9,6% in 1962. Only the term is new, as well as attitudes toward it. It is a fact however that the one parent household has become more common in big cities, in the younger age groups and also among the better off. To day the social characteristics of this category are as follows: predominantly women, (86% of the category), among whom there was an: above average incidence of clerical workers and the upper classes; equally represented: were manual workers, artisans and shopkeepers. It should be noted that 10% of the women questioned in the census gave no professions for their fathers.

The men in this category,(14%) were more commonly upper or middle class; less represented were manual workers farmers and employees. It should be noted then that when men have the care of the children after a divorce their social position is higher than that of women .

Of those in active work in lone-parent households (82%), (women only), the figure is higher than in couple households (68%), the incidence being close to that women without children, apart from the category of clerical workers, (52% against 47% in the general population of women in active work). 17% are unemployed (against 13%). In 1989 16% were below the

⁷ As a suggestion, if the north/south division of Europe is pertinent in this case and not in other cases (divorce, fertility rates), it might argued that it is the social role of children wich has to be stressed. If Italian or Spanish women have been desobedient to the church in matter of divorce or contraception, it doesnt imply that the guilt for it has vanished as it has in countries where the de-christianisation is more ancient.

poverty line (less than half of the medium income), against 10% for the dual-parent households.

Marital status was as follows: 21% single, 16% married, 20% widows, 43% divorced (1990).

'Monoparentalité' as a category covers therefore very different social origins and status. Statistics themselves do not help us towards any definition of the risk. We have to study the content of welfare policies in order to understand how the risk has been defined and who is vulnerable to it.

3/ Policies of the Welfare State

According to N.Lefaucheur (1997) the big question surrounding the category is: who should be responsible for the primary care of the child ? The mother (by working), the father (by paying maintenance), or the State (through child allowances) ? The history of welfare policy can be analysed as a series of choices, at the time regarded as the lesser of two evils, rather than as clear solutions.. From a Catholic perspective, sexual intercourse outside marriage being in itself an evil, the better solution is that of the father caring for the children even if this risks the abandonment of the children. From a Malthusian perspective, (of little importance in France, after the beginning of the 19th century), the greater evil is the father's desertion of the household or of the children being abandoned, and the lesser evil is birth control. From a nationalistic perspective (influential in France, in the first half of the century and until the 70's) birth control was undesirable since it decreased the birth rate, therefore State intervention was accepted. From a liberal-familialist perspective, the worst option was State intervention and the lesser evil birth control. The Marxist-familialist perspective focusses on the evils of poverty and regards birth control as the lesser evil.

These ideological backgrounds, claims Claude Martin (1997), might explain why social policies in the UK and France ceased to converge after 1975. In the UK, the male-breadwinner model was prevalent along with the hostile stereotyping of 'irresponsible' mothers and the minimizing of the role of the State, the latter being limited to forcing fathers to make financial contributions, rather than adopting policies which support the family. Parental responsibility is conceived as resting on biological ties. It is not surprising then to find a high incidence of poverty and unemployment in lone-parent households, since they undermine this conception.. The main fear is that of the mother's dependance on the State and the father's desertion. In France, 'monoparentalité', following the controversies over abortion, contraception and divorce, has been defined as a social risk in itself, to which the response has been to encourage women to work, and also to provide education and training, requiring maintenance from men with the State topping-up income where necessary or indeed providing full subsistence in order to avoid recourse to abortion (the main fear of the nationalists) or desertion of the children (the main fear of the familialists). According to R.Lenoir (1988) debates in parliament reveal the tensions between familialists (catholic or marxist) and the neo-liberalists, between the work-ethic and the acknowledgement of motherhood as a civic contribution. According to M.Messu (1992), what results is a compromise between socially-oriented politicians and the traditionalists. The same kind of debate is occurring at the moment with the reform project on family allowances in which it's

planned to limit family allowances to those families below a certain income level. Catholic and marxist familialists are united in opposing this reform project⁸.

In any case, the fact is that in 1976 the government created a minimum income for lone parents (API Allocation de Parent Isolé). This income (approximately 2/3 of the minimum wage and a bit more than the RMI) is available to lone-parents raising one child under 3. In 1992 this income was paid to 136.000 households (8,5% of the category). When the child is over 3, the parent can receive the RMI (137.000 households). Another benefit (about 500FF per month), family support income (ASF Allocation de Soutien Familial), is paid to 426.000 households (including 120.000 households of lone-mothers or lone-fathers and 200.000 households in which-parent status has not been established, 90.000 households deserted by one of the parents). It should be remembered that all families with up to two children are entitled to family allowances. So some 80% of lone-parent families fall into this category.⁹.

Poverty is therefore a real problem for some 16% of the lone-parent households (corresponding to the figure of 16% of households below the poverty line). The Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (CNAF) produced a typology of lone-parent households, which reveals the dominant role of poverty in the management of welfare for the 'monoparentalité'. It distinguishes four patterns :

- Households in care: these were already in care during (and sometimes before) marriage. They contain three or more children, with the father completely absent
- Dependent households: here the parents have precarious and unqualified jobs. They depend on welfare. The father is completely absent.
- Middle-range households: here the parent still has a stable job after the break-up. They receive some welfare (housing, standard family allowances) payments and the father contributes.
- Well-off households: here the parent has a university degree or at least baccalaureat and an on-going professional career. The father contributes financially and parentally.

If 'monoparentalité, therefore, is not so much a risk as a metaphor for the changing family, the fact that it has been linked to problems of poverty has two consequences :

- welfare policy toward one parent households in poverty will reveal underlying ideological conflicts concerning the changes in family life.
- Such underlying conflict will have an impact on lone-parent households living in poverty.

The case of API illustrates perfectly this process :

1/ The State will award an allowance if and only if the father doesn't contribute, (according to CNAF statistics, about a third of fathers make regular contributions to maintenance). The different benefits (API, ASF) are designed for those cases where maintenance has been ordered by a judge but not been paid but is intended to be re-paid , like a loan, at a later date. A special benefit APA (Advance on a Food Allowance) was even created for this purpose in 1981. But it soon became clear that this strategy was not effective. Firstly because many mothers refused the benefits when they were told that the State would enter into the dispute

⁸ It is a long time since family has been an apple of discord within left wing and right wing, Neo-malthusianism (in favour of contraception, abortion) is shared by liberal and socialist parties, while natalism is shared by communist, gaullist and christian parties.

⁹ At the same moment as planning the family allowance reform project, L.Jospin declared (and it is now implemented) the rise of the benefit delivered at the start of the new school year, up to 1600FF. This benefit is reserved to households under a certain income level (5millions households benefit it).

with the husband, because they didn't want to exacerbate the violence of an already violent conflict which they and the children would have to suffer. Secondly because mothers in poverty also have husbands in poverty who are unable to pay maintenance.(C.Martin, 1997). Thirdly because the enforcement of the 'food contribution', (l'obligation alimentaire), is even more likely to lead to desertion by the fathers. For these reasons the government altered the procedure by declaring the husband insolvent and allowing the mothers if and only if they wanted to, to take out a case against the husband who failed to pay.

But the 'food rule' is still a permanent threat to the mother on API, because of the lone-household condition. To benefit from API you must be alone. If a new partner arrives in the household, it doesn't release the father from the requirement to contribute, but the state acts on the assumption that the partner is in loco parentis and ceases the API . It shows, in A.Pitrou's opinion (1994), that the State still expects the father to pay. It also illustrates the persistence of the traditional family model. The State acts in such a way as to try and force the father (or father substitute) to pay, but doesn't provide any incentive for the father to care for the child in terms of its education, or in terms of household maintenance, (reproductive work in other words). In that sense, the French welfare state is still orientated to a model of the male breadwinner maintaining a wife confined to the domestic sphere and responsible for the care and education of the children and for housework. All through the period from 1970 until now, there have been attempts to keep mothers in the home. These attempts however have been unsuccessful.

2/ The criterion of lone status expresses moral and educational values. The individual's freedom in private life is undermined when a sexual partnership is subject to financial sanctions by the State. Thus there remain traces of an ancient attitude towards single motherhood in which it is regarded as a sin to be expiated. However in recent years the rise of poverty has shifted the debate and the pressure on 'the hidden partner' has been weakened.. (it doesn't mean the welfare-client relationship is transparent, see below). Nevertheless the idea remains strong idea that the mother (and not the father) should be responsible for child care, at least up to the age of 3. This coincides with the moment when maternal schools, (non-compulsory), are obliged to accept all children, (though many go as early as 2). Single mothers, if they are not working, remain with the children all day at home. This traditional socializing role is also a product of the API in the sense that API has been shaped, in the minds of politicians, as a way of reducing the incidence of child desertion. More widely, stressing the role of mother is a way of reducing the high cost of state child care - nurseries, educational centers for deserted or neglected children, etc. If API is supposed to be a temporary income for mothers without work, it represents from a legal point of view 'a suspensive-clause of the duty to work' (R.Castel, 1991) and indeed a suspensive-clause of the right to work, shown in the weakness of training schemes to help single mothers to join the labour market (A.Pitrou, 1994).

3) Discouraging work was, in the late 70's, a major issue in the welfare debate. Was the duty to work (a principle of the Constitution of the Republic) to be trampled underfoot ? But were lone-mothers to be bound to this duty ? For the first time in welfare history, 12 years before RMI, a minimum income was given to persons not incapable of work (The previous (1975) minimum income for the handicapped was shaped precisely to support persons incapable of normal work). A reform promoting true solidarity (M.Messu,1992) ? Or a symptom of hypocrisy ? It is a fact that the discouragement of work has been of major concern to the liberal right, following the debates over single-mother benefits in the USA, leading to surveys (J.C.Ray, 1985) showing that API would actually encourage the women with the fewest

resources to stay out of the labour market for a period, and also to discourage certain women from undertaking part-time jobs. Was this an unintended effect?, asked J.C.Ray Or was it exactly what some politicians had planned ? It has been an irony of history that as fast as unemployment grew, the discouragement from working debate was showing its ideological nature. The women's labour force, as always, was demanded in a period of labour shortage and excluded in any new period of labour surplus when it was suddenly required to devote itself to the reproductive work of caring, education, and domestic work.

The women's duty to work question was then transforming itself into the women's right to work, (also a principle of the constitution) question. The progress of women' emancipation, thanks to labour shortage, had gone too far to turn back. If the situation of single mothers allowed welfare policies this hypocrisy, it was not the case in the more general field of welfare and family policies. Since the beginning of the 80's welfare and family policies have at least exhibited their neutrality toward women's work. The most recent birthrate campaign (1981) for instance showed the State's recognition of the impossibility of manipulating the birth rate through family policies¹⁰. Moreover any reform or benefit suggesting women might leave the labour market to return to the home has been throughout this period stigmatised as conservative, unacceptable. Feminists, reports A.Pitrou (1994) were ambivalent: tempted on the one hand by the proper recognition of domestic work through some kind of monetary benefit, conscious on the other that work was an effective mean of socialising and emancipating women. As a matter of fact, women, although more often unemployed, forced to part time and underpaid, have been more and more present on the labour market, undertaking in particular the externalisation of domestic work.

4/ Kinship Network, Social Network and Social Strategies

It seems clear from the de-construction of the lone-parent household risk that the situation of the lone-parent household must be located in the more general question of kinship links, on the one hand, and on the other, for the most deprived of these households, the question of poverty.

The cost of women's emancipation is not only stigmatization of those who do not fit the traditional pattern, lone-parent household or reconstituted families in particular, but is seen more generally as responsible for a weakening of family ties leading authors like N.Aubert et V.De Gaulejac (1990) to stress the process of weakening conjugal ties as opposed to a strengthening of parental ones. Family networks would become ever more biologically based, (in that sense the UK welfare state would be merely following the sociological changes). In contrast authors like I.Théry show the highly generative processes through which the "sense of family" can be sustained through a great diversity of forms diversity of links whose biological bases become absolutely secondary. Discussing lone-parent households, N.Lefaucheur also underlines the role of family network, showing that very often the one parent network is bi-focal, multi-parental or complex, often larger in fact than bi-parental family networks. The survey of D. Le Gall and C.Martin (1988) also shows that the lone-parent household kinship

¹⁰ This confession, made by the first socialist government, followed the Giscard d'Estaing's attempt to raise birth rate by giving high family allowances to mothers giving birth to three children, at the time where the average number of children was 2. It had no success at all (the number of children in rank three didn't raise up). In the socialist confession, the campaign took the form of advertising posters on which a cute baby was saying : "Do i have the figure of a government measure ?" or "Do i have the figure of a socio-cultural phenomena ?". The implicit message was : we know that you are not going to make babies even if we give you money (as shown by the failure of the Giscard d'estaing's measures), but you should make babies because they are cute.

network is more complex than it is often stereotyped to be. If a third of the sample of one parent households confess no relationship at all with the partner (father), and one half a relationship limited to concerns about the child, 16% acknowledge a relationship of friendship . If half of the children involved apparently do not ever meet the absent parent, 80% regularly meet the grand-parents. Moreover, when studying the future of the lone-parent household the authors make clear that the re-composition of lone- parent households cannot be limited to re-marriage or re-cohabitation. Many forms of re-composition are often invisible, (precarious relationships with partners, attempts to reconstitute conjugality); others are more visible as in the case of those in couple relationships who do not live together (25% of the sample, and notably with a better level of education); the most visible of course are those living together conjugally. Thus hidden forms of family reconstruction may be underestimated at 8% of the sample).

From this perspective a different risk becomes profiled: the risk of impoverishment of the family network for all kinds of households. It is the fundamental social: the risk of being isolated, not only from a family network, but also, more generally, from a social network. Here a sociological process can be illuminated in which the lack of resources is connected to a limitation of the family network and to the limitation of the social network for households not fitting the dominant model of two-parents households :

1) Claude Martin comments (1993), " The better the social position, the higher the chance of getting support from the environment, whether family, ex-partner or social network". (See also A.Pitrou, 1992).

2) Welfare support seems to be more effective for qualified and active women than for inactive, unqualified one's, given that 53% of the latter fall below the poverty line (C.Martin, 1997). The negative expectations of social workers toward lone-parent households contribute to reinforce the pattern of two-parent families among deprived groups.

3) It is in deprived groups that the pattern of differentiated male (breadwinner) and female (domestic work) roles remains strongest : "Marriage means domestic work for the benefit of the new kinship network" (F.Battagliola, 1987). Moreover : "The idea every parent has about social network and isolation varies tremendously between social groups. The feeling of isolation, indeed, of being confined to family-dominated relationships is more frequent in lower class groups (C.Martin, 1993).

4) Consequently "it is in the most socially and economically deprived groups you find situations in which the absence of a second parent is most likely to handicap the child's socialization process" (C.Martin, 1993).

5) In summary then, weakness at the level of networks will be associated with weakness in the labour market and in the marriage market.

The risk can therefore be defined as a risk of impoverishment after the break-up of a union (marriage or cohabitation) knowing that the impoverishment has several inter-linked dimensions:

- economic : linked to the level of resources available for entry and re-entry into a career or into the labour market.

- social : linked to the level of resources available to re-enter the marriage market and to getting help from the family and social network.

- educational : linked to the level of resources to face stigmatization and support the school career of the children.

No one of these risks is specific to one parent households, but the situation of single mothers, as N.Lefaucheur (1980) points out, has specific features which depend on the social position of the people involved :

- Underclass : In this situation the search for a new partner is both more crucial and more difficult because there is a child (or several children) in the household.
- Young employees, domestic workers : the search for normality will be more crucial in order to erase the social consequences of a motherhood felt as deviant from the family norm.
- Older age groups among the upper classes (middle and upper classes) : lone-parenthood represents a strategy of reconversion permitting (after a professional career) the acquisition of those aspects of female status regarded as normal for females.
- New middle class : One parent households represent a strategy of social mobility through adopting alternative models at professional and private levels.

Following this line of reasoning N.Aubert et V.De Gaulejac (1990) suggest that the lone-parent situation will continue as long as women show themselves to be unable to disentangle the knots of family conflicts which is reinforce each other in such a way that the woman "pressurized" into "monoparentalité". When considering such cases, the authors differentiate between social groups. In the most deprived groups, the process of social fragmentation is strong enough to explain the one-parent career. The process of psychic repetition is here over-determined by social conditions“. On the other hand a shift in the oedipal process may explain "monoparentalité" in better-off groups : "Without the conflicts in the parental scenario, she wouldn't have entered into the one parent process".

From this perspective "monoparentalité" itself is regarded as a risk. Obviously (as in N.Lefaucheur's typology) it will be interesting to adopt this approach when considering our respondents where they declare themselves to be looking for the reconstitution of the pattern of the three-person household, declaring themselves to be searching for "normality". But it is far from being always the case : several of them (and hundreds of thousands in the population of the category) have been married, for shorter or longer periods, and therefore have the experience of the two-parent household. Unless you postulate the rejection of this pattern, in some unconscious region of the psyche, you cannot base the risk analysis on it. If you do so you accept the dominant pattern of family, whose changes are precisely what we aim to observe in terms of its risky dimension.

This risky dimension is therefore to be analysed in terms of the probability of impoverishment following the break-up of a relationship and more widely the break-up of a dominant family pattern. Strategies for facing the risk include those which mobilize resources, personal, kinship network, friends networks and state (welfare) . As shown by A.Pitrou (1992), this mobilization, its priorities and timings are different in the different social groups. The traditional strategy, in the case of break-up will be to return to the parent's home until a new relationship is established. But social networks and the state can provide alternatives to this tradition, itself excluded when the family past is rejected. Or the opposite, where break-up can lead to the loss of the kinship network and the social network as well, leaving the person solely dependent on welfare. The latter case is more likely, given that those facing the risk are usually women, i.e. those from whom support is expected do not themselves expect to ask for support. Consequently, the combination of different sources of support is crucial but also very problematic.

5/ Strategies of women in lone-parent households

Three of the interviewees (including the main case) have been contacted through our own professional and social network, the other 4 through a private organisation, state-funded, providing housing and help for single parents. All of them are women, aged 30-50. 3 come from deprived groups, 2 are middle class, 2 upper class. 3 are immigrants (1st generation). Only one is employed to-day. 3 are divorced, 3 single, 1 married (divorce not yet completed). 4 have 1 child, 1 has 3 children, and 1 has 4. The level of education is related to the social origin.

We shall analyze :

5.1. Irene : the 'strategy' of being mentally ill

5.2. Comparisons with other interviewees

5.3 Conclusions : 'monoparentalité' as a 'welfare strategy'

5.1. Irene : the strategy of being ill

Such a title requires explanation : "strategy" has to be understood in terms of a life history in which the possibility of "strategic" action is shaped day after day and year after year in such a way that it constitutes a person's conduct of and view of life at that precise moment when it's recorded by the sociologist_.

Born 1948 (aged 49) in the rural area surrounding Paris, Irene is the daughter of a waterman. Her mother, working as a domestic help, later becomes a nursing assistant. Irene, although not ill during early school, has to quit aged 10 because of poliomyelitic disease, of which she is then cured a year later. So she doesn't get her certificate of primary school and has therefore no qualification. Aged 12, she starts working as a print worker, unregistered at first (the legal age for work is 14), then regularly registered. She loves the job but quits it aged 20 at the point when she could have become a team leader in the plant. She then works for two years as a maid in a bar-restaurant-hotel, then becomes a concierge in a private building in Paris for eight years. She then takes a number of different jobs - as a toilet attendant, employee in the perfume industry and in department stores. Her last job is as a cleaning lady in a private hospital. Her hope at this time was to become (as her mother did) a nursing assistant, but she says it was then too late as she was too old_. Dismissed (her contract had expired), she remained unemployed for a year, worked again as an administrative employee, was dismissed again (1995) and has been unemployed since, spending six months in a psychiatric hospital, and is now at home on RMI. She has no job expectation or job search project. She has been working continuously from 1960 to 1991, and counting in the periods of registered unemployment and the time that she was bringing up her three children, she will be unentitled, when 60, for any pension beyond the basic minimum. Altogether her professional career and social life appears to be a failure because her status of mother has not been socially recognized. Moreover her career in the marriage market is deceptive for she never married. Her first partner (father of the first child) was a gypsy, a house painter, soon unemployed after the first child's birth and their separation. The second partner, father of the two following children, owes his professional career to her: following her from his rural origins he came to Paris and she helped him out of unemployment into a job as a metallurgical worker and later, using the network of the building where she worked a concierge, she introduced him into a job in the post office ministry where he became a civil servant as a security agent then, promoted, a chief security agent. This good career didn't benefit Irene because they separated and he married another woman. Irene remained in many ways (housing, financial) in a precarious situation. She cannot bet on the future of her children who are failing both academically and

professionally, though her own professional career could be regarded as that of a responsible, courageous and autonomous woman and mother.

Her personal and family biography is a disaster from the beginning to the present. The police, physicians, judges, lawyers, social workers are the main characters of her life story. Violence is omnipresent in the family history with battered wives (her own sister) and even a murdered one (the daughter of a first marriage of the grand father). Aged 2, Irene was "deserted" by her mother and raised, until 12 by the grandmother, whose comment on Irene's future was that she "was born under an unlucky star". After recovering from poliomyelitic disease Irene was taken back by her mother in order, she declares, to get hold of her earnings from her work. The first partner was jealous and violent. She was 20 when her first boy was born. At 18 months the baby spent 3 months in hospital because of his father's violence (he was thrown out of bed and his head knocked against the wall). Irene attempted suicide, throwing herself into the Seine with the baby in the arms. She suffered violence from the policewomen ; the child was taken away for five days. She went back to her grandparents with the child. The second partner was violent towards her and the child, he drank, charged her with his debts, and was unfaithful. After the birth of the other boys she left him : he had beaten and abused her in the presence of the children, aged 6 and 2. Both of the children were taken into care. She kept the first boy who, at 13 was diagnosed with cancer and died at 18, three months after the grandmother's death. In the meanwhile she has started a new relationship with a young man (aged 19, she is 37). After the boy's death the two younger children come back to her when she discovers the nurses are mistreating them, and she separates from the young partner. Both of the remaining boys fail in school and do not finish their apprenticeships. One starts running away from the mother and finally leaves home for conjugal life with a woman 20 years older than him. The other boy works unregistered in a bar and tells her he is homosexual. She attempts suicide again suffering from depression and is admitted to a psychiatric hospital for six months, then comes back home where she survives on RMI. She starts a relationship with a new partner, but he is impotent and unfaithful, involved in an affair with another woman, herself homosexual.

The unlucky star, therefore, is more than a figure of speech. If it could be said that becoming mentally ill is a strategy, it is because previous strategies have failed. She wanted and still hopes for (as shows up in the story of the last partner) a normal, two-parent, conjugal family : "I would like the same life as all women, happy, the husband coming home in the evening with a kiss". But it never works : "When I meet someone, it never works, either he drinks or there are other problems. I am frightened to get involved with anyone, I don't stay long for I'm too afraid it will start again. I can't. Maybe one day I will meet a decent person, I hope, as I am 49 now". Of course, when one looks at Irene' narrative, there are many contradictions between the facts, between the narrative and the facts_, and many unclear facts or narratives whose interpretation might explain the failure of the 'normal family' strategy and also the emergence of the 'strategy' of mental illness.

The core problem in the narrative is the role of mother. A mother, says Irene, is a woman who wants to have her children with her, cares for them, devotes herself to them. How can one explain then that she accepted the second two boys being taken away to a center for neglected children for nine years ? Irene mobilizes for this purpose a large number of facts that often turn out to be false, incomplete or deceptive. In justification she explains that the first child being sick (cancer) she had to protect him from the exhausting presence of the younger ones and to protect the younger ones from the disturbing presence of a sick (needing care) brother. But in fact when she accepted the solution suggested by the social workers to send the

youngsters away, she didn't know the former child was sick (she learned it two years later). She says that she went as often as possible to visit them, asking frequently for news, but in the youngest child's memory she came rarely and seldom asked for news; it was the grandmother who used to come or at least to phone almost every day. Irene explains that the children were well cared for by the nurse, so well cared for and educated that maybe she should have left them there in order to finish their school careers successfully. But she herself (as confirmed by the youngest) explains elsewhere in the interview that the nurse was mistreating the children. She recalls a scene in which the judge asks the children if they want to leave the nurse and go back home with their mother, the answer being "yes", once outside the court the boys jump for joy. But the youngest boy recalls the same scene with the grand mother instead of the mother and explains that she (and not the mother) undertook the whole procedure to get the children away from the nurse. In fact it's Irene who speaks of her mother's unlucky star, because the mother deserted her when she was 2. But she says she had a happy childhood with the grandmother, and this is why she accuses her mother of taking her away from her grandmother to work, in order to take the money. Irene explains that her mother came to the factory every week in order to get the money. But apparently when Irene started to ask for advances during the week in order to get her salary before the end of the week, the mother didn't react. It should also be noticed that the mother, on inheriting the house of the grandmother, registered it in the name of Irene, so that she would inherit it on her mother's death (whose death she doesn't wish for). Irene also explains that the fathers, the first as well as the second, have never cared for the children, which though mainly true is incomplete. The second father, at least, tried to get one child into the ministry of PTT, used to meet both of the sons (who also met the new son of the father), phoned them (even if there was conflict, at least with the younger). She even returned, after a first attempt of separation, to the father for a while before a definitive separation, because, she explains, the children were missing their father. She, herself, turned the children against the father, asking them to repeat for the judge violent scenes that they didn't recall.

Why is Irene reconstructing her biography in a way that doesn't fit completely the facts and the narrative itself ? To understand it one must appreciate the fact that Irene has felt shamed her whole life long : shame over being deserted by the mother, shame over being an unmarried mother (people looked askance at her in the village), shame over having attempted suicide with the baby in her arms (she became an irresponsible mother brought to the attention of the police and social services), shame at being a deserting mother, shame at being beaten by her husband in the presence of her children, shame over this fact being known at school and shame over her son's homosexuality. Why doesn't she accept, among all these elements, the fact of having deserted two of her children ? Maybe because she herself blames her mother for having deserted her. But maybe also because she has been forced to reveal the household's violence when the children have revealed what happened at school. She was given the choice of explaining what happened or of having the children taken away by the judge. As long as the violence remains private it is tolerable. As soon as it becomes public it has to be blamed on the husband and the husband has to be left. For the same reason she had to leave her first husband when the child was taken to hospital.

There remains a lot of obscurity surrounding Irene's life. We don't know for instance what happened to the first husband though we know that Irene is still a friend of a gypsy in their village of origin. If Irene, as she says, has been searching for a decent husband and a normal family all her life, the separation between the first child and the others can also be explained by her attempts to improve her situation in the marriage market. She was not forced by social workers to let the first child go (he doesn't bear the same family name for he's not related to

the second father); and she was indeed guilty of that first attempt at suicide with the baby in her arms. At this point a number of psycho-analytic interpretations could be offered though not conclusively validated. In the beginning of her love affair with the gypsy, declares Irene, she was 15 and not yet a "demoiselle". In making this point she means she hadn't yet started her periods. Therefore, she declares, she had flirtation with him but no sexual relationship; this happened only three years later when she became a "demoiselle". Apart from the fact that this event occurs relatively late, the point of the story is to give an impression of Irene as a person with moral standards. Her moral standards often fail in life, as we have seen, but succeed at least once in her life story, in the relationship with the deceased child. Irene was a wonderful mother to her sick child, caring and devoted. When the child is dead he was cremated and she took the urn back home with her. When attempted suicide for the second time she took the urn with her. Her plan is at some point is to bring it to her grandmother's grave. After the boy's death she started working as a cleaning lady in the private hospital where he died. One day, without realizing it, she was cleaning his former room when she injured herself by her thumb being trapped between the bed and the wall; at that moment she realized she was in the fateful room. As she tells this story Irene is using an argument she has derived from the psychiatrist's talk to neutralize the stigma against her as an uncaring mother : if she cannot recover from her bereavement, also clear from the story of the urn, it proves she was really attached to her son.

The consequences of this attachment are not negligible. While explaining the school failures of the two younger boys, Irene declares she did what she could, but it was too difficult after the death of her first child because he was no longer there to play the role of father, to impress on them the proper respect toward their mother's injunctions. There is more to this story: Irene is very proud of having been, as her grandfather used to say of her, "a real tomboy". Having given birth to two boys Irene wanted a girl, she'd already named Marguerite, instead of the youngest boy, the one who became homosexual, a girl. The initials of the boy's name are P.D. (pronounced "pédé" in French) pejorative slang for "pédéraste", in the homosexual sense. In that part of her life story which concerns economic poverty, Irene is not ashamed of saying she begged for money and stole for food, make up or underclothes. But she would never, as others do, prostitute herself. Nevertheless the second boy has been doing it and the youngest, in his bar, is involved in that milieu. The deceased boy, she declares, was very good-looking and she was proud of his feminine conquests. What about the relationship with the very young partner ? And the relationship with an impotent man ?

But none of this gives much insight into the risks Irene has faced if we do not recall that, from a strategic point of view, everything she recounts is basically true. Deserted by her mother, she distances herself from her, losing therefore a possible support, relying instead on the grandmother of whom she says : "she was my mother; when my grandmother died it was my mother who died". This gap in the family network is to be repeated in the next generation when Irene's children will desert their mother, relying on their own grandmother, i.e. Irene's mother. So the family network is truncated at both ends. Irene is deserted by the first partner. She will never again ride his beautiful bike and she will lose status in the village. She is deserted by the second partner, after having contributed to his social success. Her second partner's mother will no longer give her the support she was used to (money, food...). With the third partner, according to her she herself is the support, a mother as well as a partner for this young man and his younger sister, their mother being absent and their father ill. With the fourth (and last 'significant' partner of the life story to date, she is again trying to do something constructive. He is handicapped and cannot work, following an accident at work, but she has bought together with him a piece of land in her village of origin, in order to grow

fruit and vegetables and to make some money and improve their material life as well as build something new. But once again she will have to leave him and lose out through the break-up.

The only reliable support left is that of welfare. One of Irene's moral principles is that of avoiding welfare support and coping by herself with difficulties. She claims support only when she leaves her first partner and again on when leaving the second, on both occasions out of concerns for her children. Again, with her sick son she has to claim recognition of his illness which is not accepted until after he has died. She receives help from volunteer organizations and later a bereavement grant from social security, with some shame: "It was a big sum, really enormous". Later, unemployed for the first time in 1991, she regrets being forced to register for unemployment benefits: "It's shameful". Little by little she is to change her mind. Firstly because she's unable to pay back the money which violates her moral standards: "I don't like credit but when you are forced to you are forced to". Later on she will accept welfare support with a more positive attitude, as a right "for people like us". This admission means she has accepted she belongs to the group of the most deprived in society. For this reason she fights to have her housing debt reduced. She accepts herself as somebody mentally ill, thus fitting the requirements of somebody living on RMI. In other words her welfare strategy fits exactly the limits imposed by the objective constraints of her life. She is able, nevertheless, to have a different strategy in the field of social network. For instance, between her mates, she differentiates between a less well-off friend, with whom she relates in instrumental terms (in terms of a market evaluation of the gift and counter-gift), and a better-off friend, with whom she tries to establish a relationship based on sentiment. The remaining relationships within the family network are viewed as relationships with underclass mates (financial and material concerns being to the forefront).

5.2. Comparison With Other Interviewees

Recourse to assistance from welfare can be revealing of the lone-parent's strategy. It makes evident the situation at a particular point in time, but it is necessary to understand the whole risk to assess its role together with other resources.

One of our interviewees, Lydia, doesn't receive or need any welfare support. She is a middle class woman, aged 30, with a good job, a good family and social network. She has a boy, aged 1, and she made the decision to become a lone-parent. The partner, a high status man in the marriage market (he is a film-maker) was aware of this decision. Lydia's strategy was to use the child to get the father, if not the partner. People like us (sociologists) should not enter into her private life, even if in the biographic interview questions are raised about the educational risks for the child: what will become of a child whose mother claims he is the symbol of her love for her partner? It is possible that later, if the love strategy fails and the professional career disintegrates (Lydia has a precarious position in the film industry and is not qualified), Lydia could need welfare support. But obviously she is currently at risk, probably less so than many married or cohabiting women.

The case of Ruth, aged 50 with 4 children, shows in another way how welfare support has to be located and analyzed in the biography in order to understand its role. Born in Hungary in an intellectual upper class milieu, having succeeded brilliantly in her studies, Ruth took the opportunity (offered by her job) of a trip to Italy to leave Hungary. She married a French scientific researcher whom she met during a summer job as a cleaning lady on the French Riviera. He took her to Brazil where she gave birth to the children and where later they divorced. The divorce had an economic cost, (their standard of living collapsed, for the

husband has never paid maintenance even though he was able to), as well as social, (she was deserted by her old friends, members of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, in Brazil as well as in France). Ruth undertook psychoanalysis after the divorce, managed to feed the children (giving French lessons, opening a gymnastics center in her house, starting professional activity as a psychoanalyst), but then returned to France, where she receives day to day welfare support through an organization. She is accommodated with the four children in an hotel room and receives RMI.

It is obvious in Ruth's situation that the strong welfare support she gets will not last long. Ruth is very grateful to France, and especially to F.Mitterand for having offered her asylum (before her marriage when she became a French citizen) as a foreigner. But though she is also grateful to the French welfare system she is very critical of it, confessing she admires much more the Anglo-Saxon liberal model of welfare (in particular the British one. On returning from Brazil, she went first to London, where she tried to settle, and returned to France only because she had French nationality because of her marriage). Her criticism of French welfare, revolving around its bureaucracy, its ineffectiveness, its wastage of time and money, comes from the fact that the welfare agency accepts to pay the hotel bills for the family but not the private boarding school fees, when she wanted to register the children in order to be free to undertake work. The irony of this story is that her level of education and social origins entitled her to be better supported than the African or Maghrebian women who live in the same hotel as her, whom she looks down on because these women, she says, are unwilling to undertake work. Ruth carried on regardless with her boarding school project, where her children were accepted in the end without payment, the boarding school manager being very happy to accept such brilliant pupils and to give help to this well-educated lady in a difficult situation, offering her a job in the boarding school as an executive secretary.

The job is to start in the following month and Ruth will not need welfare support any more, at least not more than other mothers with four children, entitled to family allowances. Ruth's strategy is not only to feed the children, and even if she has accepted the job, she already plans on leaving it as soon as possible, because her project is still to become a psycho-analyst. She is not absolutely confident she will succeed, but her strategy, should she fail, is oriented toward the careers of the children who have already shown brilliant abilities (school, music, ability to cope with the economic shortage and moving house). When going more deeply into Ruth's life (Ruth herself indicates this in the interview) it appears that the psycho-analysis is a means of emancipating herself from a catholic, conservative, although non-authoritarian education. Her strategy is to reconcile emancipation with her parents' tradition. In 1956 in Hungary the family's luggage was ready for their emigration but had to be unpacked because her father resigned. Since then she has been told many times how brilliant people were who succeeded in leaving the country, and this is why she learned English and French at university. However the marriage, supported by her father, was such a failure that Ruth became critical towards her parents and their education, feeling sorry for the brother and sisters who accepted the conventional conjugal lifestyles, yet sorry for herself because she doesn't have their high standard of living. Ruth's strategy is well reflected in the following anecdote : after baccalaureat she wanted to become a dancer but her parents wanted her to study languages ; consequently she registered at the university for languages and trained in dance on the side. If Ruth declares her admiration for the liberal British philosophy of welfare, it is because this liberalism is more clearly opposed to communism, blamed for having destroyed her father. She is and will remain bourgeois but needs a bourgeois marriage which is at the same time a love affair in order to be sustain her vision of a good normal two parent family.

After Ruth comes Luana, born in 1955 in Zaire and belonging to the upper middle class, who is divorced with four children. She is supported by welfare (RMI) and is without a job or any economic resources of her own. Divorce is not the reason behind her need for support, but unemployment. Having married in Zaire a well-off man, an accountant, she followed him to France, working for a Zairian airline as a secretary, then executive secretary, then accounting executive secretary (in charge of several employees). When her husband left her she was not worried : "I didn't feel a loss because I had my wages, I could manage a living for the children. It was difficult for the children, but later on they forgot about their father". The husband not responding to her enquiries, she petitioned for divorce. Her family support is very good, several members of the family having come to France before and after her. Her social network is good too. Thanks to her work she made friends who helped her integration, because she initially felt very alone (even when married) in a country whose sociability is so slight compared to life in Africa.

The risk facing Luana is therefore not that of a lone-parent, but that of unemployment. Luana's company went bankrupt and she worked for a year without being paid. As the company managers had vanished she couldn't get unemployment benefit. She got into debt. The electricity was cut off in the house 100 km from Paris, that she had purchased (after divorce). Luana had to be supported by welfare. Her social position has been a handicap to her in the welfare agency : social workers wondered why she was asking for help (as in Ruth's case, this element indicates well the social dimension of risk. Social workers believe that Ruth or Luana should not be candidates for welfare). And then it helped her. She was reasonably supported as a true victim of unemployment: the electricity was put on again, a minimum income allocated, the unemployment benefit claim prepared, the bank informed (for the house), and a training program set up to help Luana back into work (Luana, as she was a supervisor of secretaries, hadn't been trained in computing). She accepted the training program, designed for working as a secretary again, but in fact she is planning to change her job and become a social worker. Her tactic is for the moment to accept the agency's plan for a professional future she doesn't want simply because her main strategy is to combine welfare and family resources to definitely settle in Paris where her children are doing brilliantly in their studies. It is a strategy of integration. Luana has decided not to go back to Africa, except for holidays. She can't bear it any more. She is staking all her resources on the children and on herself. The process of reproduction is far from being systematic or automatic.

After Luana comes H el ene, 34, one child, single, from a lower middle class background (her father was a carpenter, working for himself, and her mother a clerical worker). She is addicted to drugs and though having been cured with a heroin substitute, is HIV positive and in the care of a welfare agency and receiving an invalidity allowance. In other terms, she will probably remain on welfare for the rest of her life. It has nothing to do with her lone-parent situation, in the sense that this situation is not in any way the origin of the risk she faces, but of course the child is part of her life and plays an important role in her strategy.

H el ene's strategy is based on an appeal to magic. She hopes the welfare agency will get her off drugs. Previously she'd the child, acting as a kind of safeguard, would get her off drugs. Before that she'd hoped that either her partner or her parents would get her off drugs. Thus H el ene puts herself into the hands of others who will save her. In her current welfare dominated strategy she echoes the agency's definitions of herself. But she is able to play one saviour off against another one. She has used her first partner, a delivery man, whose position was not accepted by the family, against her family. She then used the family against the second partner, the father, after the child's birth. He has a good position now as an employee

in the town council, and she is now trying to get him back; he is actually caring for her and her child on a regular basis and she blames the family for not having accepted him.

Thus she appears as somebody only concerned with herself and it is not surprising that she feels very alone. It is not clear if the child is really any more than a new saviour, the "safeguard", the magic helper, as she says herself, who will release her from her problems and into the normal life that, she assures us, she has always been willing to embark on. When she realised the child was not a magic helper, she abandoned him to her parents and is only now preparing to take charge of him again. It is not easy, in this biography, to understand why the reproductive process has been a failure. Something happened when she was 15: she rebelled against parent's decision to register her for scientific study while she wanted to study literature. This rebellion led to failure at school and she didn't get her baccalaureat. After that there was no further sign of rebellion. On the contrary she declares herself still willing to follow her parents' path for her, the path of "the average French person". However she mentions, in a *l'aspius linguae*, that her second partner, was "like herself from a broken family". But the break is well hidden. The child's dissatisfaction goes far back, according to her, and is probably related to her parent's reported frustration : they'd decided to wait until completely settled, i.e. aged 30, to have the child they wanted to have. But that reflects a very classic attitude for this group. Obviously, H el ene is and has been for a long time at risk. But the risk is not the lone-parent risk, except maybe from the point of view of the state; because the child, if the parents had not been present, would have probably been taken over by a welfare agency. The 'magic' strategy cannot succeed for a very good reason : from her narrative it is clear that taking drugs was for pleasure. She also mentions (off the record) that she cannot make love without being high. Consequently, quitting drugs means giving up pleasure. Only magic (the opposite of of religion) can bring about a change.

As we review our cases, from the highest to the lowest levels of resource, we come back to to Irene's initial situation, which also shows up clearly in Laura's case. Irene and Laura both belong to the working class, (Laura's father, handicapped, died early, her mother worked as a market gardener) and both experienced poverty in early childhood and during the school years. Laura's story is similar. Irene and Laura have a similar educational level but Laura achieved her primary school certificate where Irene didn't. Laura is divorced rather than single, and she has only one child when Irene has 3. Irene's partners don't care about the children but Laura's former husband does. Both have cut their link with mother. But where Irene describes herself as deserted by her mother, Laura describes herself as having escaped from her mother.

The consequences of these differences are very important. Welfare support in Laura's life is only financial. Laura doesn't receive nor does she claim care allowances for herself or her child. She needs financial support when the marriage (with a man of the same milieu) ends. Her standard of living collapses (at this time she is still a low level employee) and the basic divorce settlement, although steadily paid by husband, at least during the first ten years, is very low due to the low wages of the husband. This illustrates how the policy of maintenance payments by the father is ineffective. Its only positive effect is possibly to encourage the husband to show concern about the child. Moreover, because of the food allowance, Laura is not entitled to family support income. Without resources, but with a job, Laura signs on for credits and later on, becoming unemployed, she is forced to ask for a credit moratorium, reimbursement being projected up to 2018. Nevertheless before unemployment struck Laura had an upwardly mobile professional career, her last job being as an executive assistant in a small jewellery company. Consequently the main risk she faces is that of unemployment.

Laura's strategy has been to escape the mother. She didn't choose her husband, a market gardener. He was chosen by mother. Her mother had had a two-roomed house built in her garden for the new couple, so marriage was not in itself a real means of escape from her mother. Laura found a job for her husband in Paris as a worker in the automobile industry, and settled there with him as a concierge. The whole kinship network has fallen apart, father and brother being dead and the mother absent. Laura quits her concierge's position, unwilling to stay confined to the building and works in an office, going out very often without her husband. She wants to "recover the time wasted during her youth" (because of her struggles against poverty and constant work). Later on when she gets into a better job she joins a short-wave local radio circle through which she communicates with friends in order to organize leisure time activities (a practice well established in upper working class and lower middle class groups). Once she's unemployed she sells the radio because she says she has no longer a standard of living which allows her to go out in her free time with friends in the network. Laura succeeded in escaping her mother. She evolved a modern kind of conjugal life, inspired, she says, by the changes in the 60's, in which partners began to have completely independent lives, her husband staying home while she went out. She describes him as "kind but without character". In fact he reminds her of what she wanted to escape from. After a while they live "like brother and sister" and they separate on friendly terms.

Laura's strategy then is to protect her son from the shame and suffering of poverty. She wants to satisfy his desire for designer clothes, and somehow succeeds in doing so. Laura's educational strategy is strange however. On the one hand, according to her, she is doing what needs to be done for the boy; she doesn't hit him but disciplines him firmly. On the other hand she says that the relationship between son and mother is a kind of one-to-one of equals, and she acts as a mother resolved to keep the child to herself. When the boy is 12 she meets a new partner, divorced and with a young daughter, who settles in her home. The man is jealous of the son and she is of the daughter. He drinks and is violent. She is not like Irene. She doesn't further the career of the man, she throws him out of "my home" and he ends up in jail. However she is mistaken in thinking that she is acting for her child's benefit, believing he wanted the partner to leave, for later the son will blame her and say she should not have acted in that way. (This could be interpreted in other ways too given that he knew the man was beating her). The boy doesn't succeed in secondary school and starts an apprenticeship as an electrician which he completes. Laura introduces the son into her company so that he works in the same place as she does. He starts earning money, participates in the household and is responsible for the shopping. Later on when the son wants to leave home she manages to get him to move only to the next street. She says it's impossible to have a partner and a son at the same time and, consequently, that she has never wanted to build a new life (i.e. a new conjugal life). Nevertheless the boy is probably right in accusing his mother of being too involved with him and not letting him build a new life.

Poverty in the lone-parent household can be even worse than Irene's when a complete absence of resources is combined with a forced marriage, immigration and divorce. Aged 41 now, Rosa was uneducated and poor before her marriage in Senegal and she married, when pregnant, a man with a better education and better social position, who agreed to the marriage on religious and moral grounds (he's a Muslim). She was poor during this marriage because he didn't contribute or help to finance the child's schooling, he beat her and was unfaithful. When he deserted her she was forced to emigrate, her only resource being the French nationality of the father. The divorce was not finalized so she had no maintenance. Once in France the family network reveals itself to be ungenerous and materialistic in spirit as it was

in Senegal. Rosa is ashamed by her pregnancy, coerced into marriage, beaten and forced to emigrate. She is convinced that she has done nothing wrong, and that she was an obedient and faithful spouse. Therefore she rejects her religion and its moral basis; her only friendly relationship in France is with a couple of African christian woman married to white men.

Welfare support for Rosa is the solution to the lack of family or social support. In France she has been working legally for six months (in a four years stay) as a carer for an elderly person, and doing unofficial cleaning since then. Rosa has sought support from welfare agencies in order to obtain her divorce, but she hasn't succeeded. Her strategy is two-fold: firstly she wants to save some money (30.000 FF) in order to go back to Africa and start up in commerce. In other words like most of immigrants she doesn't want to (and cannot) go back poor; secondly she wants her daughter to be educated in France in a non-traditional way. She puts her hopes in the daughter, who is good at school and has schoolmates. She doesn't bother the daughter with her problems; she understands her daughter may be disturbed by the family break-up, and she prefers to remain alone for fear of further disturbing her daughter. To reconcile both strategies she envisages her daughter in a boarding school, with the Christian couple as guardians and herself back in Senegal making a success of commerce. Obviously this double strategy might seem contradictory, leading to the destruction of the mother-daughter relationship, or even to worse poverty from which the daughter suffer greatly. The course recommended by the welfare agents will probably be decisive one way or another.

5.3 Conclusions

The conclusion seems clear : personal, kinship and social resources are crucial. As with other risks exclusion implies "désaffiliation" from all networks. It appears in particular in our interviews that family constitution or reconstitution can be "risky" in two directions : when the constitution of a new family implies the break-up of the original family network _and conversely when the marriage doesn't allow an exit from the familial web._ To undertake a relationship is a risky affair. To have a child more risky. To break with the relationship risky again. In this sense "monoparentalité" is not a risk but an answer, a strategy to confront three of these risks.

The question remains : to what extent can welfare support can be a resource and what kind of resource can it be ? If our work has demonstrated that being the person responsible for the lone-parent household is not in itself a risk, obviously the welfare organisations targetting such families as a distinct category risks missing its target and may not meet the needs of the different kinds of cases included in the category. As a matter of facts the needs are very different in quantity (from everything to nothing), and in quality (from psychiatric support to educational, training, job, legal etc.) and in time (from a few days to a life time). However in one way or another people seem to find at least partial solutions, managing to survive with what they have and to adapt themselves to the welfare system.

The welfare network seems therefore, in this matter, substantial enough to meet the situations, if not the needs. The fact that children exist is a powerful factor in this relatively satisfying report. In fact the one parent policy is a network of agencies and transfers superimposed on the structure of family policy in general, itself superimposed on more general welfare provision. This is why, if the solution is not to be found in the lone-parent policy provisions it may be found within the provisions of family policy or within the provisions of welfare

policy. This leads to the hypothesis that strategies for confronting the risks as well as the risks themselves are shaped by the forms of existing welfare provision. An example here is that of Irene: it seemed that a risk of mental illness (in her own and in the hospital's eyes) was highlighted because she fitted the provisions of preventive mental health policy (very well-organized in her district of Paris). On the other hand of course welfare systems seek to adapt to the new situations emerging in their daily work. For instance H  l  ne has been taken on by a new kind of agency caring for parents addicted to drugs, a situation that was unknown in the 70's or too uncommon to justify the creation and funding of a new agency. A new agency in this system deals with the new element of HIV and the threat of contamination which have been powerful incentives for developing new measures.

But situations in a risk society change faster than the organization of welfare can. Welfare systems change by creating new safety nets, but normally don't remove the old ones until they are virtually obsolete, which leads to a drain on financial resources without keeping up with changes in society. It should in particular be argued, in the conclusion of this work, that lone-parent policy is out of date, having been superseded by larger changes in the family. The inappropriateness of lone-parent policy comes from the fact that it confuses the management of poverty with the social control of deviant family life, or, from a more "social" perspective, the battle against poverty with the support of mothers who are psychologically disturbed and incapable of raising their children. What appears in the interviews is that economic shortage, unemployment and poverty are not necessarily associated with psychological or educational inability and vice versa. In fact economic needs, temporary or permanent, should logically be separated from the wider issues of family breakdown. But the management of economic needs is dispersed through separate welfare networks and strong conflicts prevent any change in their organization. Family policy in general and lone-parent policy in particular are means of dealing with poverty via a different budget system without having to debate them in public or at the parliamentary level (this is probably going to change in the coming years). Furthermore confusion between economic needs and psychological or educational impairment is food for social workers and social agencies : if you cannot do anything about unemployment at least you can operate in psychology or education. Last but not least, embarking on any debate about changes in family life is very difficult because it touches on the private domain, or rather the relationship between private life and welfare, particularly the role and place of women; and what has been done in "social" terms for a population described as "at risk" is more difficult to do for problems concerning a large sector of the population. Ambiguity remains welfare's weapon.

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I.Théry (1988), "Remariage et familles composées : des évidences aux incertitudes", Las familias monoparentales, Madrid, Ministerio de asuntos sociales

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_ The shift from kinship to home is in that sense clearly related to the rise of nuclear family. But it should be recalled that in France at least the nuclear family is not a recent phenomena. Historians have shown that three patterns of family (home) already existed as far back as the 17th century: nuclear, large-authoritarian (patriarchal) and large-egalitarian. See H.Le Bras et E.Todd (1980).

_ Allocation de parent isolé (1976)

_ The turning point is 1978 with the reprint of Andrée Michel's book, Sociologie de la famille et du mariage, Paris, PUF, where she uses the word „famille monoparentale“ (which was not in the original edition). See N.Lefaucheur, 1985.

_ Abortion and contraception laws date from 1974, but are far from being recognised throughout society.

_ We shall use the term reconstituted family. Stepfamily, as noted (I.Théry, 1988) comes from „steop“, old English word for „orphan“, therefore further contaminated by the norm of the two parent household.

_ Neither can it be argued that men would be victims of judges discrimination in divorce cases regarding the status of children. When they apply for custody this function is given to them in 60% of the case, but only 20% of men ask for it (Insee, 1994).

_ It's suggested that if the North/South divide in Europe is pertinent in this case and not in other cases (divorce, fertility rates), it might be argued that it is the social role of children

which has to be stressed. If Italian or Spanish women have disregarded the church in matter of divorce or contraception, it doesn't imply that blame for them has vanished as it has in countries where the de-Christianisation has a longer history.

_ It is a long time since family has been a source of discord between the political left and right; neo-malthusianism (in favour of contraception, abortion) is shared by liberal and socialist parties, while natalism is shared by communist, Gaullist and christian parties.

_ At the same time as planning the family allowance reform project, L.Jospin announced (and it is now implemented) the rise in benefit delivered at the start of the new school year, up to 1600FF. This benefit is limited to households under a certain income level (5millions households are eligible).

_ This admission, made by the first socialist government following Giscard d'Estaing's attempt to raise the birth rate by providing high family allowances to mothers with three or more children, was at the time when the average number of children was 2. It had no success at all (the number of children in birth order three

didn't rise). In the socialist period the campaign took the form of advertising posters on which a cute baby was shown saying : "Do I look like a government measure ?" or "Do I look like a socio-cultural phenomena ?". The implicit message was : we know that you are not going to have babies even if we give you money (as shown by the failure of the Giscard d'Estaing's measures), but you should have babies because they are cute.

_ This approach is not far from the psycho-analytic approach of C.Samalin-Amboise (1994) .

_ See P.Bourdieu (1997) : „Against both of these theories (Mecanism, i.e. the theory of action as the mechanical effect of external causes, and finalism, i.e. the theory of an agent acting freely and consciously, „with full understanding“) it is nécessaire to stress the fact that agents are endowed with habits, internalized from past experiences : these systems of perception, evaluation and action schemes, allow the operation of actions and practical knowledge, based on the location and recognition of conventional and conditional stimuli to which they are prepared to respond, and to generate, without any explicit expression of aims or rational calculation of means, adapted and continuously renewed strategies, but in the limits of the structural constraints by which they are produced and that define them". (p.166, my translation).

_ At this time she was 43 and it is a fact that it is difficult, maybe impossible, to get a training to become a nursing-assistant at this age

_ It is particularly obvious in this case because we have had a biographical interview with Irene's son.

_ The shame is written in the body. When mother decides to cut Irene's beautiful long hair Irene is furious; but when her grandmother realizes and smacks Irene's mother in the face Irene's joy is a kind of shame; the reconstructed product of an idealized grandmother (it was a hard life, but we were happy) and an idealized grand father (I followed him everywhere, he would explain me everything about the nature).