

## **Greek National Report on Lone Parents**

### ***Single Parents — the Social Context***

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There is considerable difficulty in giving any accurate estimation on the number of single parent families in Greece because the statistical data is inadequate. Various approaches give quite different numbers. It is estimated that in the European Union a single parent heads approximately 10% of families with children, with Greece having 7% such households. The European Observatory on National Family Policies provides comparative figures on the numbers of lone parent families (based on 1995 Eurostat data) which shows that Greece had the lowest percentage of lone parent families in Europe. In Greece the majority of single parents are women; the smallest proportion of these are represented by unmarried women (in 1986, 1.82 % of births were to unmarried mothers while in 1993 this had risen to 2.8%). The majority of single parent households are the result of separation and divorce. (10.3% of marriages ended in divorce in 1989 rising to 12% in 1992.) There has not only been an increase in those divorcing but also in cohabitation for which there are no statistics. The majority of unmarried mothers are in age category 20-24 years with a slight increase in the age group 35-39 who may well represent a group of women of higher average education who choose to have children even though not married. Births to those in the age group 15-19, although rising till 1980, then fell slightly and since then have been stable and are in line with the general trend which indicates that the age at which Greek women give birth will rise. One factor that may be relevant in relation to the low percentage of unmarried mothers is the relative ease (both economic and social) of obtaining abortions.

Amongst the unmarried mothers there are significant problems in relation to their social acceptance in the society. As women they also have problems in the Greek labour market since it is estimated (by the Greek TUC) that 52% of women are unemployed. Single mothers are thus ex-posed to the same risk of unemployment with more significant repercussions as they are economically the head of the household and thus have to earn to survive, given that the social assistance benefit payable to single mothers is very small (40 ECU per month) and only receivable where the mother does not have an income above 120 ECU per month. The only additional assistance they may receive is in the case of employment in the public sector where extra weight in points is given to applications from single parents. According to the European Omnibus survey of 1987 lone parent families had the lowest income levels of all households, in particular those with children under sixteen, and in addition to this economic dimension, were also the least integrated into social, cultural and political life compared to the general population (Greek Ministry of Labour - the prologue to the Programme "Combating Exclusion from the Labour Market").

In Greece programmes to combat exclusion from the labour market have included the category of single parents with particular emphasis on unmarried mothers. The assumption behind the programmes is that the factors leading to social exclusion in general, not just labour market exclusion, for single parents and especially single mothers, are: -

- a lack of educational and professional qualifications;
- social prejudice, particularly from the kin group. This is critical since for other groups suffering from labour market exclusion the kin are generally supportive;
- the lack of child care facilities;
- the lack of social networks;
- the tendency for single parents to isolate themselves in order to avoid stigmatisation.

It is noticeable that while some of these characteristics e.g. educational and professional qualifications, and the limited social networks are common for many

women, the other features are specific to the single parent category. The lack of, or limited, family support is particularly significant in Greece given the role this plays in the economic and social life of the individual. In relation to those in the lower income groups and for those from small communities, marriage still constitutes a central value in Greek culture and thus those who do not live up to these values do meet prejudice and stigmatisation. In the case of divorce, especially where the woman is not seen as responsible for the divorce/separation, and in the case of widowhood, the family networks and community support are far more extensive. The experiences of and social reactions to single parenthood in the higher income groups and urban areas are far nearer the Western European trends. One of the targets of the Ministry of Labour's program is to encourage projects that change stereotypes, attitudes and perception of the kin and the local communities and at the same time to strengthen the identity of single parents and their self perception.

In a study by the National Welfare Organisation in the Greater Athens area in the large urban district of Peristeri, (basically working and lower middle class in composition), which aimed at identifying the major needs and problems of single parent families in this area, the following findings support many of the above mentioned statements. Thus the majority of single parents were women (97%), and were working women with low educational achievements and a lack of any skills or qualifications which made it extremely difficult for them to find work. A major part of their income came from benefits which acted in many cases as a negative factor in developing initiatives in getting training and finding work. The initial care for their children and the low level of education did not allow these women to participate in any activities or have any interests. Their lack of work and concern for their unmarried state has led many to have psychological problems, to feel lonely, disappointed and under stress. Although they have a lot of free time they do not engage in a constructive use of this time. However, they have become aware of their needs and their proposals were in line with their actual needs. These included financial problems, housing, health and care of their children, and they asked for more financial benefits, housing loans, house rent subsidies, training programmes and an extended school day which would allow them to work (Hatzokou 1990). In a qualitative study in the Athens area (Riga 1991) there were similar findings although in addition the problem of badly paid work given their low level of qualification was a significant factor in their difficulties. The low level of benefits and the few women actually receiving them, given the strict conditions that had to be met in order to qualify for them, also meant that the majority were in poverty and continuing economic insecurity.

In their effort to improve their quality of life unmarried mothers have formed an association which acts as an advocate for the rights of such women and to make them socially visible. The National Manpower and Employment Organisation also expanded a special employment service that includes, with the disabled, other groups with special needs which include single parents. The Municipality of Athens opened the first shelter for abused women, with the support of the General Secretariat for Equality, and to some extent it offers some psychological and legal counselling to unmarried mothers. Other services include the Foundation for Infants (Mitera meaning Mother), which provides an adoption service but also offers shelter to fifty unmarried pregnant women annually; they allow the mother to leave the child temporarily with them until she decides *whether* she wishes to give it for adoption or to keep it. Mother Teresa's runs a crèche and nursery for the children of unmarried and single mothers, serving the needs of migrant women in particular.

### **Main case – Gabriella**

#### *Interview comments*

Gabriella had been in contact with one of the researchers two years earlier when she had arrived asking for some technical help with a feasibility study she was preparing for her enterprise. A friend others who was acquainted with the researcher had introduced her. She was phoned on the basis of this

old relationship and agreed to do the interview. Another researcher carried out the interview though the original researcher also attended. The interview was held late one afternoon at her work place. Gabriella is a slim rather nervous young woman but friendly and intelligent. She was dressed in student style clothes. She was hospitable offering biscuits and soft drinks and was obviously quite happy to talk about her situation. She is a divorced mother who has done a lot of jobs but has been trying to run her own enterprise with great difficulties. She gave the impression of being constantly under time pressures. During the interview her son came past, a slightly overweight twelve year old, a pleasant lad who asked her not to be late coming back home.

During the interview at one point she cried under obvious emotional pressure and clearly was speaking from very direct memories and experiences.

The interview was interrupted several times by various people. However, she recommenced her story without any significant breaks or difficulties. The interview lasted one hour.

### **Biographical data**

**1966** Gabriella is born in Athens to a father who was an army officer and a working mother, both of very conservative and authoritarian principles.

1970 Gabriella's sister is born.

**1984** Finishes secondary education and enters her second choice university near Volos to study foreign languages. This involves her leaving home.

**1985** She goes out with a company of friends in Athens and meets a man, eleven years older than her. She goes to Patras with him and a group of friends without telling her parents. They find out and threaten to throw her out.

**1985** She gets married without telling her parents in order to solve her problems, as the fiancée suggested. She did not really wish to marry. He takes leave of absence to live with her and his parents support them.

**1986** She gets pregnant and her husband stops her having an abortion, which she wanted since she wished to complete her studies. She gives birth to a boy.

**1987** She leaves her husband, whom is very jealous, and returns to her parent's house to live. She continues her studies and completes them.

**1988** She finds work in a frondisterio (private foreign language school), but with a poor salary and long hours.

**1995** She starts her own small frondisterio in order to earn a better income, but has to work very long hours and does not make a lot of money.

**1997** Gabriella still lives with her parents and is contemplating selling her business and going back to dependent employment.

### **Biographical data analysis**

*Gabriella was born in Athens to a father who was an army officer, from a very conservative background. Her mother always worked and Gabriella grew up with her younger sister whom she also cared for and still has a warm relationship with. The relationship between the parents was not a good one and the mother was also strict.*

Gabriella was brought up in a very authoritarian environment where there were many rules that had to be followed. This may have made her an introverted person who does not express any positive feelings, particularly towards her parents. The fact that her mother works suggest that there is a fight constantly going on between the parents as to who has the upper hand and this is expressed in one being more authoritarian and moralistic than the other. Gabriella is likely to try to avoid any kind of authority and will want to try and break free from the authority of the father. On the other hand the fact that she has a working mother is likely to influence her to also see herself as an independent economic actor and she is likely to identify more with her mother who does not represent

the authority in the household in contrast to the officer husband.

She is likely to follow the social mores of the family in contrast to following her own desires. It will be hard for Gabriella not to share at least some of the same moral principles.

*Gabriella has a younger sister who she looked after from an early age because their mother went to work. She cared for her, got her up and took her to school. She remembers that there was a lot of pressure on them as children and no pleasant moments; they just went to school and home and they were not allowed out for pleasurable events at all.*

Despite all the pressures from the family Gabriella manages to follow the family's expectations and look after her young sister successfully. She appears to be an energetic and effective person despite her young age, who is able to carry out her responsibility successfully. It also gives her an outlet to express some positive, loving feelings that she rarely experiences from her own parents.

The lack of pleasure in her family life suggests a family with a strong moral code revolving around the idea of duty and this is something which Gabriella may rebel against later. In particular she may try to escape from the authority of her father. However, she is also likely to be strongly influenced in the acceptance of the family goals of education and respectability. She may try to obey the moral norms in order to obtain the continued approval of her family.

The fact that Gabriella has to look after her young sister indicates that her family are isolated and are more typically nuclear in form than is common in many households in Greece, which can still rely on grandparents and other kin in the care of small children.

*After completing her secondary education she passed for a university department in the provinces. She rented a flat and went to live there. On a trip to Athens she met a man eleven years older than her who was interested in her. With two other friends they organised a trip to Patras about which she did not inform her parents. Her parents called up the landlady who told them that their daughter was away with men. Her father threatened to go and pick up her things and throw her out on the street.*

Gabriella fulfils the family expectations by entering higher education. Whatever happens in her personal life she will probably try to finish her studies since she has internalised the family's values and also because she is effective in the tasks she sets herself or are set for her. At the same time she is a person who is prepared to take risks. Support is given to the hypothesis that she tries to escape from her father's authority and control and go against the family's moral codes. At the same time she has selected for a relationship a man who is considerably older than her and in a different stage of life. The threat from her father though frightening Gabriella, as she is economically dependent on him, will not stop her from continuing her relationship. She will either try to find work to become independent or will rely on the boyfriend who, as an older person, may be able to support her.

*Gabriella's boyfriend decided they should get married in order to calm her parents. However, her parents threatened that they would kill him since they had sent her to study, not to marry. Gabriella gets married without telling her parents and despite of her own wishes since she wanted to complete her studies.*

The hypotheses that Gabriella will take risks and will not succumb to her father's threats is reinforced, as is the fact that she relies on her boyfriend as a way of escaping her father's authority. However, this marriage, which is in some senses forced on her, is likely to be unsuccessful since it was not her free choice but a temporary, strategic solution to her economic and psychological problems of independence. Another element that supports the probability that the marriage will fail is the fact that Gabriella's experience of her own parents' marriage is a negative one. Moreover it is not a marriage set up on an equal basis since she is dependent on her husband and this to some extent reproduces the problem she has with the authority of a father figure she is trying to escape from. Her partner appears to be a man with traditional values in the sense of seeing marriage to a girl that he may perceive as having been dishonoured by him as the solution to the problem.

However, in this he may resemble Gabriella's father as having rather old-fashioned attitudes about relationships between the sexes and the attempted domination by the male. The new family is also likely to be bound up in the same issues of moral duty as her family of origin.

*Gabriella's husband is jealous of her and she de-scribes her relationship with him as very oppressive. After a year she became pregnant; she wanted to have an abortion since she wished to complete her studies. Her husband told her that only prostitutes have abortions and threatened to sue her gynaecologist if he performed an abortion. Gabriella thus kept the baby and had a little boy.*

Her husband's authoritarianism and attempts to dominate her are evident in his decision to keep the child. The inequality in their marital relationship is further demonstrated and the hypothesis that this marriage is unlikely to be successful is reinforced. The husband is a problematic character and negotiating a more balanced relationship will probably not be feasible. Gabriella is again trapped in a situation where other's choices and values are imposed on her. It is possible that she will try and escape from this situation. She has no degree or economic independence and thus, as a single parent the probability of finding work would be very limited. Thus she may see a return to her parental home as a possible solution. They are a family with strong moral principles but they would have to accept back a divorced daughter and her child even if they did not approve either of her marriage or of her separation.

Once the child is born she would not abandon it or leave him with the father since she has positive feelings about mothering that have evolved from her experience of bringing up her sister. The husband would be very angry if Gabriella left him since it would demonstrate a significant failure on his part.

*After having her baby the situation worsened between her and her husband and he gave up his job abroad and all three moved to Athens. He was unemployed and his family supported them. Gabriella had to deal with the interventions of her parent's-in-law who were checking on the money they were giving to support them. During this period Gabriella's parents refused to have any contact with her and her family. However the worsening situation with her husband and in-laws forced Gabriella to take her child and move back to her parent's home. Her family, though not accepting her with pleasure, nonetheless supported her economically and she finished her degree.*

The hypothesis that Gabriella will finish her education is demonstrated despite all the difficulties of divorce and having a new baby. Also evident is that she does escape from a dominant and authoritarian husband and his family. In this respect she takes the risk of going back to a bad situation which she already is familiar with and accepting, at some level, the authoritarianism and negative criticism of her father. The chances are that she will be forced to stay in this situation until she can earn enough money to support herself and her child. Given the kind of studies she finishes and the obligations she has to look after her child, she will not find it easy to develop a career strategy where she will be able to earn an adequate income.

*After graduating Gabriella found work in *afrontistiria* (private foreign language institutions for children) teaching foreign languages. The employment conditions were very bad, with many children in each class, long hours and low pay. It was very difficult to live on her salary and she continued to stay with her parents. Her husband did not give her any child maintenance until the child was eight years old. Her parents criticised and insulted her for all the early years though her mother cares for the child while Gabriella works.*

Gabriella managed to find work and appears to have a lot of strength and energy that enable her to cope with both an arduous job and the care of her baby. The sense of duty that prevails in the family ensure that her parents never get to the point of throwing her out or refusing economic and physical care. Despite the pressures and problems Gabriella is under she reacts positively and has a strong sense of self esteem that enables her to manage both the physical, economic and psychological stresses she

must be under. This positive self-image may have derived from the relationship with her sister and then her son. The probability is that she will seek ways of improving her financial situation so that she may become independent of her family. The relationship with her son will be a very important one for her as she tries to give him some of the positive childhood experiences that she did not have.

*The low salary and long hours which kept her away from her son made her decide to start her own small frontistiria. She borrowed money and set it up in a relatively poor neighbourhood but near to her home. She was active in promoting it but found it difficult economically. She earns a salary from it but the expenses of running it are too high to enable an adequate profit to be made. She is thinking of selling the business. She has offers of jobs from where she used to work. Her main objective is to earn enough, perhaps through taking on two jobs, to enable her to rent a small flat for her and her son and leave her parent's house. She has a boyfriend.*

Gabriella is a risk taker in that she chooses to take on a loan in order to start her own business and potentially improve her position. Nonetheless she is limited in her business decision making by her need to stay near her child. She will apparently continue to look for active strategies of escaping from her economic situation. After nearly eleven years living with her parents she has learned to deal with their disapproval and ignore them to some extent. Her major goal is to bring up her child well and to this end she is prepared to use her parents since she feels that they have a duty towards her. She will not leave them until she either marries someone, though in an equal relationship this time, or until she is able to earn a safe and adequate income. In the end, although this may be delayed, she will achieve her goals of economic and physical independence from her parents.

### ***How will Gabriella present herself?***

Since she has not had a pleasurable and good time in her childhood one might expect that she will present herself as a rather miserable person with a lot of references to bad luck and misfortune. On the other hand given, that she has had some positive experiences from her relationship with her sister and son, and by achieving certain goals e.g. her degree and her own enterprise, she may stress these positive aspects of her life. Another possibility is that she will not narrate since she has very few positive memories to record. A significant part of her narrative may be devoted to moral codes and values as well as sets of assumptions about actions and what things have to be done. As she is a person who is an active fighter and accomplishes tasks she has set herself, we could expect that she will use positive forms of speech and emphasise her accomplishments more than the bad side of her life.

### **Thematic field analysis**

Gabriella presented her life in her initial narration in just one page of text. This confirms the hypothesis that since she has few positive or pleasurable aspects of her life to recall and also does not see herself as a victim who wants to find sympathy from the other (the interviewer) she avoids going into any depth with respect to her feelings and her memories. She began her narration with an evaluation of her parents, saying how strict they were and that she grew up in a very oppressive environment. She then summarises her life in one paragraph using only report to describe the main events in her life - her childhood, her studies, her marriage, the birth of her son. She then moves on to using argumentation when she talks about the poor employment conditions in the private sector where she has worked and the exploitation she has experienced. She evaluates the difficulties that a single mother faces bringing up a child and closes with an argumentation that divorced mothers have no help from anybody and have to rely on their parents. This in turn has a price which she feels she is still paying. She ends by saying that she recognises that she has been very brief in her initial narration.

For the rest of the interview Gabriella, prompted by the interviewer, answers all the questions in detail and gives a lot of information. Her style includes all forms of narrative - from epic narratives to evaluations and argumentation. What can be said about the whole

interview is that in no place does Gabriella ever present herself as a victim. She criticises her parents at various points in the interview, and even starts all her narration with a negative evaluation of them, and yet she does not blame them for what she went through in her life. Objectively she is the victim of limiting and emotionally problematic parents but she does not verbally acknowledge this.

She speaks for the greatest length of time about her relationship with her husband, their married life and the problems she had in getting child maintenance support from him. Another issue that she describes in detail is the insults and criticism she still receives from her parents and it is at this point in the interview that she expresses strong emotions by crying. It is significant that throughout the interview, even when describing the oppression she experienced from her husband and her parents and her employment and income difficulties, Gabriella never uses strong emotional phrases to express rage or anger. She speaks in a neutral way about her life, and her expectations for her future are presented in a very realistic way. While at times she appears pessimistic she is predominantly pragmatic e.g. with reference to the difficulties of making money from her current enterprise and of finding a husband while her child is still young. Thus the pain that she does express when crying still revolves around the father who is punishing, rejecting and constantly undervaluing her.

### **Case structure**

Gabriella is an individual whose life has been determined by an authoritarian father from whom she tries to escape, but she only succeeds in marrying another version of the same kind of man. It is not surprising that although asked to talk about her life starting from her childhood or from whatever point in her life she wishes, she begins her narration talking about her father:

*My father was in the army and very strict and my mother had very rigid moral code. I and my sister grew up under a lot of pressure and deprived of anything except school. Things like games, fun, we had no such things.*

*... Imagine to be fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and not to be permitted to go the cinema with a girl friend, to go on the school outings, everything was forbidden. Home and nothing else, Home- school and that was all.'*

What Gabriella is also saying indirectly is that she never experienced enough love. This is also evident when she talks about the relationship between her parents:

*'They didn't have a good relationship and when two people haven't got a good relationship and they don't get along well, then they can't pass on to their children any peace and quiet.'*

At the same time Gabriella could not identify with her mother as the role she played in the family was a double faced one. She tried to be friends with her daughters but when they began to trust her she then gave them away to the father or she suddenly reverted back to being morally severe and punishing.

*My mother was very strict. She was more of a diplomat meaning that while she pretended she was our friend, the moment you showed her what you needed and wanted, she suddenly became very serious and very strict and what we were asking for wasn't illogical. It was what a child of our age asks for.'*

This unsatisfactory, untrusting and unloving relationship that the mother has towards her own children is evident throughout Gabriella's life. The mother, even at the point where she is apparently helping Gabriella by looking after her son, makes Gabriella feel guilty by telling her that she has mined her life since she is trapped into caring and is not free to do what she would like. Although the evidence is partial we have a clear indication that she never stands by Gabriella's side in any sense - either in defending her against her father or the outside world. Gabriella played some of the mothering role to her sister and this suggests that Gabriella's mother rejected much of the mothering aspects of her life. She is a person of duty who carries out what is expected of her but without any obvious talent and emotional investment.

Gabriella, in order to escape from this environment that is without emotional

warmth and consists mainly of control and repression, seeks to find affection and a way out elsewhere. Marriage was an easy solution for her as a young woman:

*Marriage was a reaction to this oppression. The situation was such that it was not my personal choice to say 'I want to get married', it was the quick and easy solution.'* Gabriella's life is thus determined by the difficult relations in her own home. She never invested emotionally in this marriage but simply wanted the protection it offered and the ability for her to live away from her own home. This is evident in the priorities she had, which were to complete her education and not to start a family:

*'I wanted to cohabit. I was very progressive in this sense. I had no intention of having a child because I was still a student but I got pregnant and one thing led to another.'* The husband she is accidentally married to, is older and eventually comes to reveal himself as very much like her father since he tries to control her and impose his will with violence. He leaves his job abroad and becomes unemployed and dependent on his own family for economic support as a result of his jealousy and attempts to control and own Gabriella.

Gabriella wanted to have an abortion in order to continue her studies but he insisted on the birth.

*My husband found the gynaecologist and told him that if he did an abortion he would prosecute him. He wouldn't let me out alone at night. He locked the door and took the keys. Well...of course he had his psychological problems. The basic reason that we divorced is that he has a pathological form of jealousy, it is basically this sense of ownership not to lose this person. Not that his behaviour was better, he would hit me, he struck me and swore and when I decided that this relationship would end, he made a scene, he broke things, and I was pregnant. And I said to myself be patient till you have your child and then you should leave. And I left and I went back to where I started from.'*

The lack of economic independence and resources is what forces Gabriella both into her unsuccessful marriage and then into her return to her parental home. The humiliation of this and the acknowledgement of failure - non-completion of studies and marital failure - create a worse situation in her home.

*'What can I say. When I went back home my father didn't talk to me at the beginning. I had humiliated him to his family with my marriage and he passed on, through my mother, the message that "What does she think. That something important has happened because she had a child. Even turtles have children., So what!" There are some things that you can never forget. It was terrible. And even today they haven't got over it. All these years they've offered me help but in a way that makes one feel like rubbish. They help you but also trample on you.'*

Gabriella realises how difficult it is to bring up a child alone in a country where the state offers no economic or social support. She tries to overcome these problems by working hard e.g. finishing her degree while the baby is still small, working long hours to earn her wages, and by taking calculated risks e.g. in setting up her own small enterprise. As she says:

*'The conditions for a woman who brings up a child alone, without any help, are very tough which in the end exhaust and destroy her. I am not talking only about myself. I have heard other stories of unmarried women, divorced, who have no help. You either are obliged to your mum and dad and you pay the price, or you work morning to night to support yourself. Thus the relationship with your child is lost.'*

Despite her difficulties Gabriella tries to lead a normal life both in relation to a warm and close relationship to her son but also in relation to other men as boyfriends and friends. She is still subject to the control of her parents when they are at home, explaining where she is and when she will be home (she is now thirty one years of age). She is realistic in the way she sees a future marriage saying:

*'Those women who manage to remarry are those who have a lot of time and money and the freedom to be under pressure in their relationship. Not to carry around their problems in their relationship. Few women have managed to remarry. In order to invest in a relationship there must be certain preconditions. Let's be honest.'*

Gabriella is not particularly worried about her status as a divorced woman and single mother; the



only thing she worries about is having some private space with her son. She believes that when her child grows older and she has more money she will manage to restart her personal life. She recognises that part of her problem comes from the negative attitudes in significant sections of Greek society towards a divorced woman with children. Undoubtedly this relates to the issue of income since many men in this context still see themselves as the main breadwinner, and taking on the economic responsibility of another man's children would be seen as a heavy burden.

*'Who wants to marry a woman with a child who cannot support herself? I have a relationship but it's difficult to say that we are going to end up in marriage. First of all his parents are against this relationship, without even knowing me. And for a man it's difficult. He's used to a bachelor life and suddenly to get into a relationship where a child is already there sets a lot of limits from the beginning.'*

It appears that Gabriella will eventually succeed since she takes risks, works hard and sets goals she can accomplish. Currently her main goal is to bring up her son in the way she wants and through a good quality loving relationship. One important dimension of this for her is to ensure that he receives all the advantages that other children with two parents have - i.e. private foreign language lessons, sports, and clothes. This involves her in expenses which would be difficult to take on if she tried to live alone. Thus it appears that despite her expressed wish to have her own home, she has decided to put up with the inconveniences and insults from her parents in order to get what she wants for her child. It may still be that she is still seeking parental approval and love which she hopes to win by being a good mother, her successful career or economic success. Thus not having left home represents her current state of still being economically and emotionally trapped inside her original family.

## **Conclusions - Discussion**

### ***Family background***

Gabriella makes no mention throughout her interview of any family beyond the immediate nuclear family of birth. In this sense she is unique in not setting her family in a wider social and kinship context. It also suggests that her family are relatively isolated and have to deal with their practical and emotional problems within this very narrow group. The evident problematic nature of the parent's marital relationship, the lack of affection and love in the family from the parents to the children and in particular the limited mothering and care that Gabriella appears to have experienced are negative influences in her life. Yet on the other hand she is an independent and able person who takes on responsibilities from a young age, carries out her duties and she must have undoubtedly gained some of her self-confidence and ability to work from her parents. She never manages to leave her family of birth since when she marries she enters into an even worse emotional trap where a very jealous man seeks to control her. Her marriage is an attempt to escape the control of her parents and this mistaken solution is what will determine her future as a single parent.

Although the family is the original source of the problems that Gabriella faces, they also represent the solution. They do not abandon her when she is divorced and however grudgingly and emotionally, continue to support her for many years. Again the family in this Greek context provides the support that the state does not.

### ***Work***

Gabriella has grown up in a family with a working mother and this represents the norm for her own life. Her father is also a career officer for whom duty and hard work are values that are seen to lead to success. Thus on both sides Gabriella has identified with the idea of work and career and education as the mechanism to achieve this. Despite all her difficulties she eventually completes her education.

Her experiences as an employee reflect many aspects of the Greek labour market where the oversupply of graduates, particularly in the area of studies she graduated from, leads to a ready exploitation by many employers of employees. Female graduate unemployment is particularly high. Gabriella tries to overcome this situation by setting up her own enterprise. This is not easy given that she has no capital and has to rely on friends to help her. Nonetheless it is also the case that self-employment is high in Greece since it is seen as a solution to the problem of tyrannical or exploitative employers as well as a partial solution to the oversupply of unemployed teachers and arts graduates. What is striking is that she does not just give private lessons at home but sets up a well thought out business, a thing that rather fewer people will undertake; this indicates that she is able to contemplate and take on risks. However she does not always calculate risks accurately and this is evident in her enterprise which she will probably sell since it does not earn her the income she needs and expected to make. However she is now in a rather different labour market position but appears to have offers of jobs from potential employers.

### ***Relationships with the opposite sex***

Despite her problematic relationship to her father and husband she has no apparent negative attitudes towards men. Gabriella's first relationship with a man is as an immature young woman and is a way out of her parent's strict environment. Thus it is to some extent doomed from the start. Later on as she gets economically more independent she has relationship with boyfriends on amore equal and mature basis. She does not wait for this relationship to become one where she receives love but is prepared to give of herself and try hard to make it work.

### ***Relationships with children***

Gabriella, despite not wanting the child she conceived with her husband and being forced into giving birth to it, appears to be a very loving mother and the child is the centre of her life. In many cases giving birth to an unwanted child leads to many problematic emotional relationships between mother and child; in this case there are no such problems. Addition-ally the fact that the mothering that Gabriella had experienced from her own mother had been not overtly loving might have been expected to reproduce itself in a more problematic relationship (overprotective, exclusive, rejecting etc.) with her son. Yet she manages to have a sense of herself as a person who though loving and caring for him also has a strong sense of herself as an individual and her own relationships as an adult woman.

### ***Networks of support***

As Gabriella states, there are no formal support networks for single mothers. In order for her child to attend school for longer hours, thus enabling her to work, she has to pay for a private school where he can stay until the afternoon. This involves her in extra costs. Again this represents one of the economic factors which means that she has to stay in her parent's house and under their moral supervision.

In Greece the networks of support revolve predominantly around the family, kin and close friends. Gabriella does not mention any help from any kin or close friends. The only help she recognises verbally is that which she gets, grudgingly, from her parents and the very limited financial assistance she receives from her ex-father in law.

The help of the family in one sense is inevitable since although they may not want to continue aiding her, they are worried about what the society around them will say if they do not.

### ***Strategies out of exclusion***

Gabriella's self-perception of not being a victim but an active player in making life choices helps her

develop strategies which will ensure that she is not socially and economically excluded. She already knows that education is one of the key resources for social and labour market integration. She never identifies herself as being excluded in any sense. Her problems arise from the objective lack of support for parents, and even more so for single parents. In her personal life she has relationships and an active social life. This means she has to make more of an effort and tires herself but she prefers this to being isolated with her son and her family and essentially completely marginalised. She moves around on her motorbike, is friendly and outgoing and obviously does have friends to draw on. She makes the effort to be good company and forget her troubles and difficulties since she recognises that other people do not want someone to try and offload their problems onto them.

Thus in both her work and personal life she has active strategies to ensure that she is acceptable and relatively successful and integrated within the wider society.

In summary Gabriella is a thoroughly modern individualist who, though still caught up in unresolved and probably unresolvable emotional relationships with her parents, has developed personal life strategies, is able to take risks and can rely on her own personal and intellectual capacities. Despite being deprived in her childhood of positive loving emotions, she seems to have overcome these issues and become a balanced and effective person. If she had grown up in a welfare state that offered support in the way of services and economic assistance, it is clear she would have managed much earlier to leave her parental home and thus not continue to be exposed to the psychological weight of the unsatisfactory relationship with her parents.

## **Other cases**

### ***Family background***

As in Gabriella it appears that in the other cases the family background constitutes a determining element in the fact that people become single parents. Thus attempts by parents (or grandparents) to over control their children within a conservative moral framework had repercussions on the children who sought to escape from their parent(s) and live within a more morally liberal framework which they experience around them. Escape from the parental generation for many young women can most easily be achieved through marriage since it is socially expected. However, since the primary motive is escape and the marriage, by virtue of the over-protectiveness of their conservative parents, may take place when they are still very immature and inexperienced it is not surprising that the choices made will often be inappropriate. Additionally such women will not easily be able to develop a relationship of equality with their husband since their only model is that of the patriarchal and dominating father, even where he is a loving one.

The negative effects of the family of origin on the life histories for those interviewed is evident in other areas such as sexuality, expectations of the life trajectories of their children and the selected values that they instilled. While the relationship with the other sex is mediated through class and educational backgrounds some of the same issues of parents trying to over control their daughter's sexuality arise. In Letta's case the fear of sexuality instilled in her by her mother made her unable to consummate her marriage with her husband; subsequently it is as a sex worker that she earns her living, which constitutes one way in which she opposes her mother.

Another type of situation is that of Eleni who in order to fulfil the family expectations, married in haste someone who fulfilled the desired family stereotype of an ideal husband. However, within her own lived life she begins to seek to escape from the traditional model by seeing herself as an independent woman. She refuses to submit to what she interprets as the domination of her husband who demands that his name is added to her property before he is willing to give any help in building flats for them (to live in and to rent). She asserts her independence partly through using what she has been given from her family of origin but mainly by demonstrating that she can manage to create

resources through her own paid work. She can contemplate taking her husband back to live with her only when she feels that the relationship will be an equal one. This equality is expressed for Eleni through economic independence.

Ritsa also came from a family that attempted to control her future in terms of their educational expectations; however she "escapes" by leaving Greece to study near her sister in Germany. She creates an immature relationship which does not end in marriage but which leaves her with a child. Loukas, from a very poor family background, postpones marriage until late and then marries someone twenty three years younger than he is. With her he insists on having two children, despite her lack of interest. This may well relate to the normative model he had of the ideal family with two children which he forces on someone who can only resist by finally walking out and abandoning him and the children. Teresa also marries at a young age in an attempt to solve her problems of stigma i.e. her orphaned status and her weight problem, but also as a way of fulfilling her grandmother's moral code in relationship to the other sex..

### ***Work***

The people interviewed have had to work for their living for most of their lives and have not depended on their partner for economic support when single parents. This is striking for the women who are single parents since they live in a country where women with children often do not work. Nonetheless their position in the labour market is vulnerable since they are not in well-paid jobs and this is evident in not having a steady career and by changing jobs. Letta has been without any income for the past three years since she can no longer work in the bars. Eleni lost her job when the factory where she was working closed down and now she works a door-to-door sales person who cannot rely on making a steady income. Ritsa, despite having an education, works in a less skilled job caring for other children in a big company nursery. Teresa worked in two jobs, in the family kiosk and in her own fast food shop. Currently she works part time in the kiosk as she also cares for her sick grandmother and lives on the kiosk income and the three widows' pensions.

Loukas, the only man, has had many jobs as a skilled tradesman but with the responsibility of care for his children he is in great difficulties and has had to hire a woman to care for his children and house while he works harder to pay her salary.

### ***Relationships with the other sex***

It appears that among those interviewed there was a considerable lack of reflexivity and maturity with respect to their choice of a marriage partner or with respect to their relationships to the other sex. Letta, as the very spoiled child of old and poor parents, has no values which allow her to think of herself in terms other than her own beauty. Her relationship with her doting father who treated her as a doll influences what she expects from other men. She chooses a dubious partner whom, with the responsibility for the care of three children already, does not want to take on the care for another child and a woman who offers very little. Thus she has a number of relationships which always let her down but she never manages to find the father protector who will love and spoil her, although she is probably still looking for this type of man.

Eleni was strongly affected by her identification with her grandmother, a strong but careful woman as opposed to her weak and careless mother. Thus in her relationship with her husband she gave priority to financial security and capital accumulation in her own name and did not trust her husband. Only when she obtains the economic security which gives her the sense of equality with her husband can she contemplate them getting back together.

Ritsa was an immature girl who got pregnant from a younger student who could neither take on the economic or psychological responsibilities for the child. The opposition of both parents ensured that the marriage never occurred and she was left alone with the child, keeping away from her parents

and their social circles. After efforts to try and keep this relationship with the child's father alive and a long period of relative isolation, she finally emerges into greater independence and a mature and equal relationship with a single man.

Teresa suffered from the lack of a father figure during her adolescence. This and her weight problem makes her unable to have a sense of being able to choose a man but rather feeling grateful to the first man who is interested in her. The absence of husbands in her family background makes her particularly vulnerable and dependent on him emotionally, and thus she tries to keep the relationship alive despite all its evident difficulties. In her current situation of poverty, unemployment, three young children, a sick grand-mother and a weight problem, it is hardly surprising that her objective situation and her expectations do not permit her to consider relationships with the other sex at the moment.

Loukas made an immature choice of a young woman with whom he decided to have children. He blames her for not being a good mother and yet he had chosen a very young woman whose primary interest in him was sexual as he is a good looking man. In leaving her alone for many hours while he was working, she became jealous and created problems. His lack of understanding of the situation he had created led to his wife escaping him. Now he has to find another wife who will be willing to look after his children; thus he will be vulnerable to any woman who decides that she can look after his children. Thus his choice will be "traditional" i.e. a good mother/housewife and will not be based on his own individual preferences but as a solution to the social and domestic problems that he faces currently.

### ***The relationship with children***

Letta and Ritsa had accidental pregnancies. In Greece abortion is cheap, safe and readily available and studies have shown that it is considered to be a method of birth control for many women irrespective of age and educational level. Thus why they decided to give birth to these children is an issue for discussion. They may well have stayed pregnant and kept their child as a way of trying to ensure a marriage with the person with whom they had had a relationship. Teresa, although married and having had one child, also uses pregnancy as a way of trying to keep her husband close to her. In one case her husband forces her to have an abortion but then has two more children. Her children represent her main goal in life at this stage of her life.

In Loukas' case he marries as a mature man and the children were much wanted by him as he had a traditional family model in his mind. He disregarded the attitude of his wife to children, which was indifferent; however, he remains devoted to and happy with his children. Eleni was a traditional married woman for whom children were an expected part of the marriage; her regret is in the separation with her husband which did not give her the chance to have more than the one child.

### ***Networks of support***

For the women single parents the family of origin represents the only form of support. This support is not only economic but also in terms of offering childcare services and in some cases emotional help. Public nurseries/creches are very few for babies and infants while kindergartens and schools in the public sector are open for very limited hours. Typically the hours are from 8-12 and this does not coincide with working hours. Thus single parents must find alternative solutions either in the form of private care (paid private kindergartens and schools which open longer hours, or baby sitters) which is expensive for single parents, or alternatively be forced to rely for help from their own parents, kin and/or friends. Families are willing to offer help even in cases where there is a problematic relationship to their children, as in the cases of Lena, Ritsa and Gabriella.

### ***Social strategies out of exclusion***

Economic problems were serious for all the people inter-viewed, particularly since their ambitions were not only to earn enough to provide their children with a good education but also the comforts and hobbies that are now seen as the "right" of Greek children, which cost money. They expressed their desire to ensure that their children had exactly the same privileges as their fellow pupils and school friends. They felt that their children, already deprived of one parent, should not also experience material and social deprivations.

Lelia is in the poorest situation since she has no income of her own and no strategies for earning her own living in the future. She is at risk of social exclusion since she is paralysed in her current stage. Additionally her son is to some extent at risk of social exclusion as he finished minimum education, has no job and cannot even get into the state training school for an apprenticeship. His main hope for a way out of his mother's situation leading into social exclusion is to migrate and live permanently with family, including men, with whom he can identify and find employment.

Teresa has grown up in poverty and has developed strategies based on the family enterprise and the pooling of incomes/pensions, in order to survive. Although she has no formal qualifications she has much experience of self-employment and a wide network of kin, neighbours and old customers who will help her to find work when she can re-enter the labour market. Thus although in a very bad financial situation and in real poverty, she is not at risk of social exclusion. She has a central role in her family and the neighbourhood.

Ritsa experienced a sense of social exclusion initially as a single mother but recognised that this was both the result of her own attitudes and fears as well as the objective reactions of others around her to her single parent status. She no longer feels marginalised but quite integrated into work and social life.

Neither Loukas nor Eleni have been at any risk of social exclusion since they have always been able to earn an adequate income.

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