



Family Matters



Circular No. 14

Follow-up to the International Year of the Family

June 1998

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The FamilyUnit

The Follow up to the International Year of the Family is the responsibility of the Division for Social Policy and Development within the Department for Economic and Social Affairs. The follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family are in accordance with intergovernmental mandates e.g. General Assembly resolutions 47/237 of 20 September 1993 and 50/142 of 21 December 1995 respectively.

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UNDP and Programme Support on Family Issues

UNDP's collaboration in 134 Programme Countries is focused on promoting an enabling environment for sustainable human development. This focus is strongly linked to family issues through policy and programming initiatives to promote poverty eradication and sustainable livelihoods, environment regeneration, good governance, gender equality and the advancement of women. There is a special focus on eliminating the cycle of female poverty which is associated with intergenerational poverty.

The range of UNDP activities, working closely with UN system agencies, in

Programme Countries and closely linked to family issues, gender equality and the advancement of women include:

- the further development and testing of statistical systems and gender equality indicators for the valuing of women=s work as well as measuring the role of women in societies, building on the work of the Human Development Reports;
- empowerment of women in economic and political decision-making processes, working with Governments, finance institutions, parliamentarians, civil society and community-based organizations;
- capacity development for gender analysis and for gender equality practices;
- legislation and judiciary capacity development to combat violence against women; and
- poverty elimination programmes.

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United States Department of Labor

Employment Characteristics of Families in 1997

The data cited are based on information collected in the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, a monthly sample survey of about 50,000 households that provides data on national employment and unemployment. Some of the highlights of the findings include:

- The number of dual-worker families - families in which both the husband and wife worked - grew by 352,000 between 1996 and 1997, while the number of Atraditional@ families - couples in which only the husband was employed - declined by 145,000.
- The labor force participation rate of mothers increased from 70.8 percent in 1996 to 71.9 percent in 1997, as the rate for unmarried mothers (single, widowed, divorced, or separated) increased by 3.2 percentage points to 75.0 percent.
- Among mothers with children under a year old, 57.9 percent were working or looking for work in 1997, compared with 54.3 percent the year before.

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Families

Over the year, the proportion of families with employed persons increased by about 0.6 percentage point for white families and by nearly 2 percentage points for black and Hispanic families. Nevertheless, black families continued to be

less likely to include an employed member (77.1 percent) than were either white (82.7 percent) or Hispanic families (84.1 percent). These data include families whose members are beyond working age.

In an average week in 1997, about 4.9 million families - 7.0 percent of all families - had at least one person who was unemployed. This proportion was down from 7.6 percent in 1996. The proportions of white and Hispanic families who had at least one person unemployed declined by 0.6 and 1.4 percentage points, respectively, while that of black families was about unchanged.

Overall, married-couple families and families maintained by men were more likely to include someone who was employed, about 83.8 and 85.9 percent, respectively, than were families maintained by women, 74.0 percent, in 1997. The proportion of families maintained by men that included a worker grew by 2.5 percentage points and that of families maintained by women that included a worker increased by 2.3 percentage points from 1996 to 1997.

The number of married-couple families in which someone was unemployed fell by 320,000 to 3.1 million in 1997, while, among families maintained by men or women, the number with unemployment was about unchanged.

Among married-couple families with children, the number in which both parents were employed increased by 165,000 for families whose youngest child was school age (6 to 17 years of age). The number was about unchanged for married-couple families with pre-school children (under 6 years of age).

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Mothers

The labor force participation rate of married mothers stayed a little below 71 percent. Among mothers of children under 6, the labor force participation rate increased by 1.6 percentage points to 64.8 percent. Married mothers with children under a year old were more likely to be in the labor force than their unmarried counterparts - 59.2 and 54.0 percent, respectively.

The unemployment rate of mothers with children under 18 fell by 0.4 percentage point to 5.5 percent. This reflected a decline of 0.3 percentage point in the rate for mothers whose youngest child was school age and a decrease of 0.6 percentage point in the rate for mothers with pre-school children.

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International Movement ATD Fourth World

The International Movement ATD Fourth World observed the International Day of Families, as it has for the past five years, by creating opportunities on several continents for very poor families to work on human rights issues together with others who support them. The organization disseminated a public statement, cited below:

When a family is so poor that its members are never sure of being able to stay together, how do parents educate their children about human rights? One mother says, >The only thing we can offer our children is to tell them about reality. We have to tell them, 'You can't eat more today, or there will be nothing to eat tomorrow. When we do that, we are putting a burden on them that children shouldn't have to carry. But at the same time, this is the only way we have to make sure our children won't destroy themselves, we have to tell them about reality@.

In all parts of the world, extreme poverty pushes parents to teach their children more about reality than they want to. It also thrusts children into a life where different realities clash starkly. In contrast with the reality in their family, there is the reality of the world around them: where their parents may be considered incapable of raising them or even of loving them; where their living conditions have to be hidden from those who would judge them; where they may even be pushed to lie about their family=s love for them.

For instance, children living in the streets tell journalists that they have been abandoned, so that they will receive help for survival. In reality, some of these children chose to leave their families, in the vain hope that they might be able to help them financially. Elsewhere, a couple avoids taking their undernourished child to the nutrition center, because their child could be taken away, and that would destroy the family.

Through these acts, very poor families show us that human rights education must be based on respect and responsibility. In defending human rights, these families make a unique contribution by showing us just how indivisible these rights are. This contribution must be better known and acknowledged. We must acknowledge that, due to the harsh realities of their lives, the poorest teach their children the meaning of human rights in the strongest way possible.

The Despouy Report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13) is a landmark in that respect, when it states: AVery poor people have a clear idea of what rights should provide to ensure respect for the dignity of any human being. Hence, there is a need to draw on their experience the better to understand and secure the foundations of human rights, especially as, by virtue of their permanent resistance to hardship, the very poor - those families, for instance, who invite other families from the streets into their own overcrowded dwellings - are de facto defenders of human rights. AWe@, they say, A do not leave people out in the street.@

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The New York Family Policy Council

It is an independent, non-profit educational organization maintaining a

cooperative association with Focus on the Family and Family Policy Councils in other states. It is independently funded by Board of Directors, Advisory Council, businesses, individuals, and foundations.

The New York Family Policy Council exists to reaffirm and promote the traditional family unit and the Judeo-Christians value system upon which it is built. To accomplish this Mission, the New York Family Policy Council:

- **Influences Public Policy.** By assisting state lawmakers and other public officials on issues that impact the family through pertinent research, experts testimony, policy analysis, and briefing sessions.
- **Provides Information and Resources.** By serving as a reliable source of research, publications, and policy analysis regarding New York State family issues via broadcast and print media and the Internet.
- **Promotes Responsible Citizenship.** By acting as a resource to religious and community organizations, individuals and families.
- **Establishes Professional Advisory Boards.** By networking physicians, attorneys, educators and others to provide counsel and influence as needed.

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Russian Family Under Reforms and Activities of the Women=s Union of Russia (WUR)

Serious social outlay of the transition to the market economy - a sharp reduction of living standards of the majority of families, collapse of the system of state social guarantees, undevelopment of mechanisms of social self-defence of families, changes in moral orientation and values, impossibility of rapid psychological and social adaptation of families to new conditions of survival -has lead to acute crisis manifestations in family=s function.

At the same time, the attention of the state to family problems decreased considerably: state assistance is extremely insufficient, constitutional guarantees of family=s rights and interests don=t work, laws are not often observed, governmental programmes are carried out partly or are not carried out at all. All this cannot but intensify the process of disintegration of the institute of family, dissociation of members of the family, instability of marriages, crisis of relations within the family and as a result - a decline of family=s responsibility for fulfilment of its original functions.

Among the most acute problems and factors that affect extremely in the negative the vital functions of Russian family first of all it should be singled out sudden decrease of socio-economic potential of a considerable part of the population, rise and increase of mass poverty and mostly among families with children.

The main causes of this situation are: continuing decline of production, partial employment and high level of unemployment, low salaries especially in rural districts, irregular payment of wages, children allowances, pensions, rise of the cost of living.

With the regard of these basic orientations AThe main directions of the state family policy@ were worked out and approved by President of the Russian Federation in his edict no. 712 on 14 May 1996.

This edict was preceded by a number of documents concerning family problems and basing on constitutional regulations of state protection of family, maternity, paternity and childhood. It also indicates that family policy is forming into a self-dependent orientation of state activity in Russia.

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