

IN DEPTH

Single-Moms-By-Choice Are Doing A Fine Job, Thankyouverymuch

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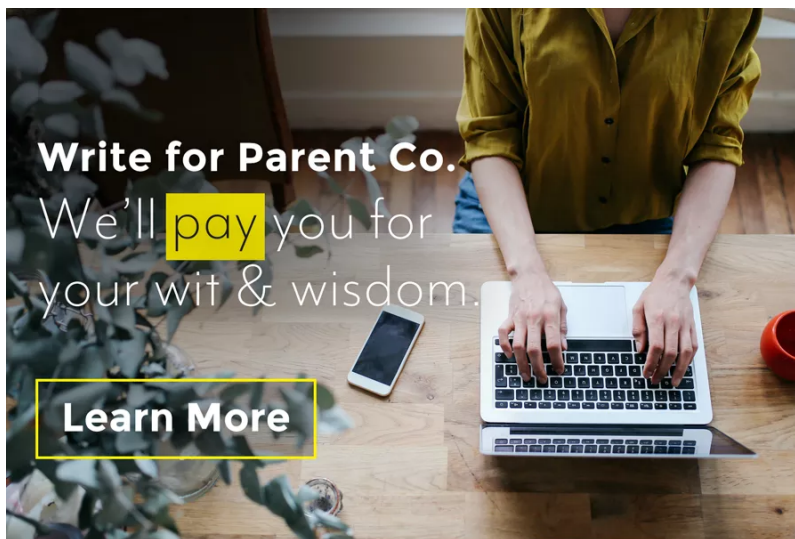
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Families come in all shapes and sizes. Households with children being raised by single moms is on the rise. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2016 more than 80 percent of about 12 million single parent families were led by single mothers. Today one in four children under the age of 18 are being raised without a father. Many of these single mother households are not by choice, and almost half live below the poverty line.

But there is also a piece of the single-mother picture that comes from a fairly new social trend. Experts are seeing an increase in women choosing to have a baby on their own without a partner. As of 2012, single women made up 2.3 percent of those undergoing in-vitro fertilization treatment to get pregnant. That number does not count the women getting artificially inseminated using a less invasive process called Intrauterine insemination (IUI) or those who are adopting children.

Many of these women just have not yet found the right romantic partner, but recognize that their biological clocks are ticking. As women age, the quantity and quality of their eggs start to decline, reducing their chance of getting pregnant. Women are most fertile in their 20s, followed by the early 30s. After 35, fertility drops noticeably each year, so by the time they reach 40, they will have less than a 10 percent chance of a successful pregnancy with their own eggs. Some women have taken action by freezing their own eggs when they were younger, and then going through the process to get pregnant in their 40s once they realize they have not found Mr. Right.



With so many more options available for women, experts have begun to analyze how different households potentially impact the children. For a long time, studies showed that children suffered if they were not raised with a father at home. However, that information did not consider a conflict in the home, such as a difficult divorce or a father who abandoned his family. New information seems to indicate that it is now more likely that any negative influence on development depends more on the relationship between children and their parents than the fact that they grow up without a father.

Also, there is a huge difference between women who choose to raise a baby on their own and women who are forced into an unfortunate, challenging situation. When a single-parent home is not planned, the stress of the situation can negatively impact a child's behavior. This is mostly because it is hard for the mother to handle the financial burden, additional responsibilities, and emotional strain of taking care of the children by herself.

A recent study written by Mathilde Brewaews of the Centre of Expertise on Gender Dysphoria of the VU University Medical Centre, Amsterdam, which was presented at the study at the 33rd Annual Meeting of European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) in Geneva, explains that children in single-mother-by-choice families do just as well as those in traditional two-parent families with a mother and a father.

The study compared 69 single-mothers-by-choice and 59 mothers from heterosexual two-parent families with a child between the ages of 18 months and six years. Parent-child relationships, mothers' social support network, and children's well-being were compared between family types using multiple surveys. The majority of the women in the study admitted that they would have preferred to have a child with a partner, but chose to do it alone due to stress regarding fertility. According to the study, "most of the women were financially stable, had received a higher education, and had meaningful partner relationships in the past".

The analysis made the following key conclusions:

- *There were no significant differences in emotional involvement or parental stress between family types.*
- *Single-mothers-by-choice showed significantly higher scores on the social support they received, but also on wanting more social support.*
- *There were no significant differences in the children's internal and external problem behavior (well-being) between both family types.*

The fact that single mothers who chose that path formed a strong social support network makes a huge difference in the children’s lives. One could go so far as to say that it may be more important for children’s growth and emotional health to have positive relationships with adults – whether they are aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, neighbors, teachers, babysitters, or coaches – than it is to live in a strained household with two parents or a struggling single mom.

Study author Mathilde Brewaeay recommends that women who are contemplating having a child on their own should spend time building a strong social network for the support they will need. This seems to be a good recommendation for all parents. The phrase “it takes a village” is certainly true, and we should all ask for help and support when we need it, for both our and our children’s sake.

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


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