

# Single mothers in poverty: A symptom of failed economic policies <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Eisler, Riane & Mitchell, Shireen

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## EXCERPTS:

In a recent article in the New York Times, Katie Rophie defends single motherhood, arguing that single mothers are not a "bad thing for society." She is right. Indeed, the fact is that what's bad for society is not single motherhood. Nor is single motherhood the cause of so much grief for children and our nation's huge poverty rates, including the disproportionate poverty rate of U.S. single mothers. Poverty, and not mothers, is the problem. And this poverty is not inevitable.

Sweden has very high single mother rates but single mother families have very low poverty rates. That is because Sweden's policies support caring for children in families. Sweden provides universal health care, generous paid parental and family leave, parenting education, child care (including high quality early childhood education) and other caring public policies.

By contrast, our rich nation's policies fail to provide support to caring for children. For example, they still do not provide paid family leave. This not only affects single mother families; it affects all families. As shown by a recent U.S. report, nearly half of working first time mothers missed paychecks to care for their children. In the words of Lynda Laughlin, Family Demographer at the Census Bureau:

"Access to paid leave is limited, and it's also sharply regressive. For working families where the norm now is for both mom and dad to work, not having some kind of paycheck coming in while they take time to take care of a child can be a real financial burden".

This burden is a major cause of the large percentage of poverty for U.S. families. And the problem is exacerbated for single mothers because they are paid less than men, married women, and women without children.

And there is even more. The failure of U.S. policies to support caring for people starting in childhood is not only terrible for families; it is terrible for U.S. competitiveness in our global economy.

Consider that Sweden as well as Norway, Finland and other Northern European nations that invest in caring for their people starting in early childhood are regularly in the highest ranks of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness reports. These nations are investing in their "human capital" -- in developing their nations' human capacities, which accounts for their remarkable economic success, low poverty rates, low crimes rates and a generally good standard of living for all.

It is essential that we take a fresh look at our national policies -- and their dismal results. Not only are U.S. poverty rates extremely high, with one out of five children living in poverty; crime rates are also high, with all the resulting costs not only to crime victims, but to taxpayers in court, prison and other attendant public expenses. Even more costly is the enormous price our nation is paying, and will pay, if we continue not to invest in our human capital.

In light of these facts, which are readily available, it is all the more shocking that some policy makers are actually advocating further cuts in our national investment in human capital development -- in health, child care and education. This of course will be disastrous for single mothers and their children, causing even more unnecessary suffering and lost human potential. But in the long term, it will also be disastrous for all our families, and for our nation.

It's high time we change the conversation about both the economy and single mothers. The conversation about single mothers should focus on how the extreme poverty of U.S. woman-headed families is a symptom of failed U.S. policies. And the conversation about the U.S. economy should focus on the urgent need for a caring economy: economic measurement, policies and practices that ensure we have the high quality human capital urgently needed for national competitiveness in our globalized economy.

-reprinted from Huffington Post

**Related link:** In Defense of Single Motherhood: Katie Rophie <sup>[2]</sup>

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** poverty <sup>[4]</sup>

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#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/09/single-mothers-poverty-symptom-failed-economic-policies> [2]

[https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/opinion/sunday/in-defense-of-single-motherhood.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/opinion/sunday/in-defense-of-single-motherhood.html?_r=1) [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [4]

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