

## New Parenting

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Changes to gender relations and sexual relations in society have in turn resulted in changes to family structures and patterns of parenthood. While the traditional heterosexual parenting patterns remain to be the most common, other forms of parenting such as single sex parents, i.e lesbian and gay people and single mothers and single dads are increasingly making family and taking over the role of parenting.

Depending on the social/cultural values of societies such modern concepts of parenthood and family life are subject to acceptance or rejection. Yet what we cannot disregard is the fact that today there is an increasing number of such unconventional families and that these families play a vital role in shaping new patterns of parenting and create new dimensions to our understanding of family and society.

It is no longer possible for us to deny the existence of these families/parents. Therefore, It is essential that we understand the effects of these changes on society and children who are at the heart of it and adjust our legal/social policies to accommodate these new families/parenting systems. Whatever the debate may be on the ethical values of these new entities one thing is certain that they are on the increase and will continue to increase as more and more young people are subscribing to these new gender and sexual relationships.

As such if we are seriously thinking of transforming risk to benefits it is essential that we understand the challenges faced by these young parents. As the more challenges they face it become increasingly difficult for them to cope up with their roles. This inability to cope invariably leads to endangering the children who are in the relationship.

The following are a few examples of the challenges faced by these families though the list is not exhaustive. However, depending on external factors such as society and time these may be subject to significant change.

- The stigma attached to being single sex parents (i.e. lesbian or gay) will want such couples to keep their family lives away from the public gaze. However, having children itself put such couples with grater contact with the public either through having to access children related services (eg. NHS/primary care), school, children's extra activities and so on. The more they want to be away from the public eye the more they get attracted. The frustration caused through this anxiety and stress can be directed towards the children or their partners in many forms including verbal and physical abuse.
- These couples who would have been previously childless may also face challenges when they have to share their lives with the children (most of the time when they are not the biological parents). Particularly when they have to cope without additional family and institutional support. Such families may feel socially excluded and isolated which can be an adverse affect on the emotional well being of the young children as well as the parents.
- Such families also have to face the challenge of not getting appropriate recognition as a legal/social entity and therefore may face problems relating to accessing related legal/social support and care which are readily available to conventional heterosexual families/parents
- Even when there is legal provision made within the system, not having trained professionals to deliver such services is an issue that these couples have to put up with. Service providers are not competent enough to assess the needs and vulnerability of such parents as well as the children of such relationships.
- Where the mothers of the children are the biological mothers, these women also face the problem of balancing the needs of the children with the needs of their partners which may be a grate strain on their relationships leading to conflict.
- Additionally there is also the problem of having to co-exist with similar genders and therefore the problem of who takes which role?
- While these are some challenges facing the parents there is also challenges faced by the children of such family units which needs careful attention and in-depth researching.

As such it is very vital that social workers/policy makers are made aware of these new relationships and are educated to act sensitively to the needs of such families/parents and children. It is also necessary for us to call for our legal systems especially family/adoption and inheritance laws to be amended to address the diverse needs that are faced by a large proportion of people in society.

- To conclude it is very important that we understand the challenges facing such families and amend our existing family law/legislature and policies to accommodate the needs of such parents. Failing to do so only will result in great social distress for a large proportion of adults/children

Your views and comments are greatly appreciated.