Are Single Fathers really Different from Single Mothers? The comparative study on welfare needs, social support, and seeking help behavior of single fathers and single mothers in Taiwan

Solo parent families are not new phenomena, however, the proportion kept on increasing, also, their welfare needs brought new social risks and challenges to current welfare systems. Though wide-ranging studies have explored on understanding and analyzing solo parent families’ daily life experiences as well as welfare needs, majority of the focus are on single mothers; also, most social services for solo families are specifically targeted on single mother families. However, the proportion of single mothers and single fathers are almost similar (probably 6:4) in Taiwan, due to the legal system and patriarchy ideology. In addition, doing domestic works as well as being a carer for children are still not normal gender role for most married men in Taiwan, however, solo fathers are forced to do so, still, we knew very little about single fathers’ living condition, welfare needs, social support system, and seeking help behavior.

This study intends to bridge the literature gap by using three combination of research methods to answer the following questions: First, by analyzing the Taiwan annual 「survey of family income and expenditure」, this study will show the change in the composition, trend, and characteristics of single families, specifically in terms of gender differences, in Taiwan during the past two decades. Second, by depth interviews with thirty single mothers and single fathers, this study will compare the gender differences in terms of living condition, the conflict between work and caring role, welfare needs, the strategies they used to deal with the conflict, social support system, and seeking help behavior. Finally, by focus group with service providers and teachers in primary schools who have experiences working with solo parents, this study aims to understand the usage and limitation of current social services and related social policies for sole parent families, specifically for solo fathers.

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