





EXECUTIVE LETTER

Policies that Benefit Solo Mothers Towards Ethnic-Racial and Gender Equity

In this executive letter, we propose a reflection on Solo Mothers and the impact of this family arrangement on the professional development of these mothers and on the financial, emotional, and psychological health of these families.

A mother becomes solo when there is a paternal absence in the dayto-day life of a child, making the woman the sole or main responsible for the child or adolescent. Such family arrangement can happen by a process of choice, in which the woman opts for independent reproduction, excluding the father figure from the child's experience. But, most of the time, it occurs due to unwanted/unplanned pregnancy, which continues without the support of the child's father or father's absence after divorce, termination of a relationship, or death. Still, there is a peculiar situation in family arrangements: the father's presence sharing space and day-to-day life, but all the attributions of affection, care, responsibility, and training fall on the mother.

According to data released in August this year by the National Association of Registrars of Natural Persons (ARPEN) (2021), almost 100 thousand children born in 2021 do not have a paternal name on the certificate, which represents 6.3% of the total number of births. The percentage increased compared to the index of 2019 (5.9%) and 2020 (6%).

In many cases, paternal absence is partial or total, even when the father's name is registered. Estimates by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) indicate that in 2015, the country had 11.6 million families made up of women without a spouse and with

Solo mothers are not exclusive to the poorer classes, but the problems and consequences are aggravated by racial and economic issues. The household arrangement formed by self-declared black or brown

women, without a spouse and with children under 14 years of age, concentrated the highest incidence of poverty: 24% of the residents of these arrangements have a per capita household income of less than US\$ 1.90 and 62.4% less than US\$ 5.50 (IBGE, 2020). Also, when considering single mothers who reside in households with restricted access to services such as education, social protection, housing conditions, and basic sanitation - it is estimated that 2/3 of these mothers are black.

Added to these issues, the advent and rapid evolution of COVID-19, in the year 2020, directly affected solo mothers. The closing of schools forced these mothers to leave their children at home, many without supervision and occupation since there was not such a large adherence to remote work in the most basic activities. Another relevant factor is that the economic sectors that were most affected by the pandemic are also those that most employ women and single mothers, such as accommodation and food services in the tourism sector, domestic servants, and the manufacture of clothing and footwear (BRASIL, 2020).

Still, to analyze the consequences of the pandemic and other possible social disasters, the research on the scenario of solo parenting in the European Union (2020) showed that if there is a longer period of austerity from now on, it is the solo mothers, low-income people, who are more vulnerable, who are unemployed or undergoing irregular activities, earning lower wages to be able to support their family.

In Brazil, some rights are provided by law for working mothers to be able to reconcile employment and childcare, including Maternity Leave, in which the woman who works in the private sector has the right to remain at home for a paid period of up to 120 days (which can be extended for another 60 days when the company is registered in the Citizen Company program of the Federal Government); the Breastfeed-



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ing License, in which the working mother has the right to breastfeed her baby up to six months during working hours in pre-determined periods; and Daycare Assistance, in which companies with more than 30 workers are required to offer daycare assistance to children up to 5 years of age. The aid can be offered in cash to fund an institution chosen by the parents, or by providing a space in the workplace to receive the children.

Such rights still fall short of what is guaranteed in other countries, such as Sweden, where the law also provides for parental leave of up to 120 days a year when children are sick, with reimbursement of expenses. Parents of children under 9 years old can opt for a 6-hour working day and there is a public daycare service for children up to 13 years old. For single mothers, in addition to a universal income transfer system for children, which mainly benefits the group of mothers who live with children and without a spouse, the country's social security service guarantees financial support to mothers in cases where the fathers are unable to pay child support.

In São Paulo state, we became aware of some public and community initiatives aimed at women who take care of their children alone. The "Tem Saída" project, for example, is a partnership action of the São Paulo City Hall Economic Development and Labor Department with other public bodies, which have the support of private companies, which provide job opportunities for women in situations of domestic and family violence. Financial autonomy and employability mainly benefit women who become single mothers when they seek a home without the presence of a violent partner (Prefeitura de São Paulo, 2019).

The Solo Maternity Support Collective is a community initiative that collects donations and distributes baskets (containing milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables, diapers, and hygiene products) to around 120 families headed by women who are at risk food and social vulnerabilities (Coletivo de Apoio à Maternidade Solo, 2021).

Specifically, in the area of management, the reflection on the difficulties and challenges that single mothers face in the labor market becomes even more relevant in the current scenario, in which academic discussions and corporate initiatives prioritizing gender diversity and inclusion become strengthened.

Given that motherhood is a particular factor for women, which in itself can generate certain restrictions to their professional development, some women raise their children alone, without the presence and paternal support, whether financial or emotional, which makes it even more difficult the conciliation and development of professional life with the care of children. It is necessary to look back and think about management strategies that enable the professional development of these women, generating better living conditions for the whole family (Roman, 2017), financial (Brady & Burroway, 2012), and psychological health (Crosier, Butterworth, & Rodgers, 2007; Zakaria, Lazim, & Hoesni, 2019).

In this sense, we list some corporate policies that could contribute to the transformation of the reality of these women and, consequently, would also be actions towards gender equality:

- Flexible hours, which are following the children's school entry and exit times, in addition to time off in the event of illness or to resolve issues at the child's school;
- Financing or supporting sports movements and recreational activities for children and teenagers at times contrary to regular school hours, ensuring a longer period of occupation, healthy activities, and less idle time;
- To institutions that adhere to the young apprentice program, prioritize or make internal calls to mothers of adolescents over 14 years of age, giving them the opportunity of their first job in the same

- work environment as this mother;
- Offer training, conversation circles, and awareness-raising moments with all employees, concerning solo parenting, the specific actions offered by the company, thus creating an internal support network;

Considering the complexity of the theme, the search for solutions, policies, and effective actions with solo mothers require, mainly, the involvement of public authorities and discussion in convergence with different areas of knowledge. In this context, future academic studies can contribute i) reflecting on the role of companies in the context of solo mothers; ii) including the discussion of solo mothers as a way to reach gender equity; iii) carrying out surveys and monitoring the reality of female collaborators, who live the reality of single motherhood, knowing their vulnerabilities and their greatest needs.

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Executive letter received through Editor-chief invitation:

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