Building Family Support Systems

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre 7th Biennial International Conference

Proposal

The role of family support information services for separated and divorced mothers in Ireland:

Rosemary Crosse & Michelle Millar

UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre

School of Political Science & Sociology

NUI Galway

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of family support information systems in supporting separated/divorced mothers. Data from PhD research into Irish mother’s experiences of marital dissolution; with a specific focus on the effectiveness of Irish family policy and the value of service provision in this area, highlights the need for services to be adapted to meet the needs of changing diverse family circumstances.

Given that in excess of forty five thousand couples have legally ended their marriages in the last decade and with the majority of children residing with mothers, it is evident that social policy and service provision have a significant role in supporting mother headed families through consequent transitions, which inevitably occur following marital breakdown.

Results from this research highlighted difficulties for participants in trying to negotiate the Irish system of supports in all its guises; with a dearth of information, personalised support and qualified advice all being particularly problematic.

This is the first piece of Irish research to look at how Irish social policy and service provision responds to the distinctive challenges faced and the inimitable needs of mothers who have experienced marital dissolution and even though the provision of social services in Ireland
has increased and has developed to take account of a multitude of needs; current information resources do not consider the social, emotional and financial stressors faced by separated/divorced women and their children. This study has identified that gaps in existing provision would be significantly reduced and positive outcomes in terms of the social and emotional well-being of those experiencing marital dissolution would be significantly increased by the development of family support information systems.

**Key words:** family support, divorce, family policies, information, access