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LATEST STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Nearly 60% of single parents are not ready to rate their child's emotional well-being as very stable

With the aim of providing comprehensive support to single-parent families, Studenac has launched the Orange Fish platform – offering free sports and arts activities, tutoring, psychological support and summer camps as part of its 2025 programme.

Zagreb, 28 May 2025 – Lack of time, financial instability and elevated stress levels are part of everyday life for many parents raising children on their own. More than one third of parents in single-parent families rate their financial situation as poor, while nearly half are unable to afford additional tutoring or courses for their children. These are just some of the findings of the latest study on the challenges faced by single-parent families in Croatia and the differences compared to two-parent households.

The research was conducted by the Improve agency and the LET Association, and the results were presented on 28 May in Zagreb as part of the launch of the new edition of the *Orange Fish* project – a support platform for single-parent families initiated by Studenac, Croatia's largest retail chain.

Croatia is home to 218,198 single-parent families

According to the 2021 census, Croatia has 218,198 single-parent families, more than 80% of which are headed by mothers. The aim of the study, presented by Gordana Vujević Hećimović from Improve, was to gain deeper insight into the challenges these families face, particularly in the areas of parenting and education, children's mental health, financial stability and parental stress.

The results show that every second parent in a single-parent household cannot provide their children with what they consider necessary, compared to 19% of parents in two-parent families. In addition, 44% of single parents are unable to afford extra tutoring for their children, compared to 9% of two-parent households. Furthermore, 31% of school-age children from single-parent families are not involved in extracurricular sports or arts activities, with nearly half of parents citing financial constraints as the reason.

"Financial difficulties are among the greatest challenges for these families. In fact, 62% have a monthly income below EUR 1,500. As a result, almost 40% rate their financial situation as very poor or rather poor and unstable, compared to 8% of two-parent families," said Vujević Hećimović, adding that financial issues are also the main source of stress for more than 60% of parents raising children on their own.

Additional sources of stress include the challenge of balancing daily responsibilities and the lack of time for personal interests. "More than 70% of parents in single-parent families identify these challenges in their everyday lives, compared to around half of parents in households where responsibilities are shared. It is particularly concerning that nearly 60% of single parents consider themselves unhappy, compared to approximately 30% of parents in two-parent families," she concluded.

15% of parents recognise anxiety or stress in their children



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Children's mental health in single-parent families is also a cause for concern. Nearly 60% of parents in this group were not prepared to rate their child's emotional state as very stable. Furthermore, 15% recognise signs of anxiety, stress or more serious emotional difficulties in their children. By comparison, 57% of parents in two-parent families rate their child's emotional state as very stable, while only 5% report noticing similar mental health challenges.

Following the presentation of the research results, a panel discussion titled "*When the system (doesn't) listen: what parents say and what professionals hear*" was held, during which panellists supported the findings with personal experiences and expert insights through an open and emotional discussion.

The panel included Iva Jovović, President of the LET Association, who highlighted numerous challenges her organisation addresses when advising members. "A particularly serious issue arises when divorced parents fail to receive child support from the obligated parent. These arrears can reach as much as EUR 40,000," she noted.

Consistency and routine were also highlighted as key elements in parenting. "Routine is not meant to be a rigid schedule, but rather an emotional anchor for a child, providing a sense of security and stability. At the same time, it serves as a safe harbour for parents, allowing them to manage responsibilities while still spending quality time with their children," said Klara Zečević-Božić, MSc in Psychology, who provides free counselling to single parents and children through the *Orange Fish* project.

Single mothers also contributed to the discussion by sharing their personal experiences. Television journalist Elizabeta Gojan emphasised the importance of support from loved ones and used the opportunity to encourage others to contribute to initiatives such as this one. "I redirected my Studenac loyalty points to this initiative, and I encourage everyone using the Moj Studenac app to do the same," she said.

In addition, Sonja Lončar, a business analyst and single mother, stressed the importance of self-care and time management. "It's essential that we, as parents, take care of ourselves. Because, honestly, only when we are content and fulfilled can we cope with the many challenges of parenthood," she concluded.

About the Orange Fish project

Based on the insights gained through the research and the need to raise awareness of the many challenges faced by parents and professionals alike, Studenac launched the comprehensive *Orange Fish* platform. Activities began last year, when dozens of children from single-parent families attended a summer camp in Veli Lošinj as part of the project.

This year, the initiative has been expanded to provide systematic, year-round support to families facing these challenges. Already, the platform enables single parents to enrol their children free of charge in various sports and arts activities, access advice to help navigate parenting challenges, and find ideas for quality time together. The content is continuously being expanded, and from September onwards, free tutoring for schoolchildren will also be introduced.

This year's activities once again include a summer camp for children, back-to-school packs with essential school supplies, and Christmas gifts for children from single-parent families. The platform also offers free forms of psychological support for children and parents, which is particularly important given that 67% of parents surveyed said they would use professional support if it were free of charge.



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Since its inception, Studenac's initiative has been recognised and supported by numerous companies, sports and arts centres, associations and individuals who have contributed to its rich content and will continue to take part in its further development.

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