

FAMILIES IN ECONOMICALLY HARD TIMES

*Experiences and Coping
Strategies in Europe*

Edited by
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Families in Economically Hard Times: Experiences and Coping Strategies in Europe

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Chapter 4

Material Deprivation and Personal Wellbeing of Single Mothers in Lithuania

Aušra Maslauskaitė and Ernesta Platūkytė

4.1 Introduction

Single mothers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society in the good times, but even more so in the bad times following an economic crisis. Generally, single-mother families in many countries are exposed to high risk of poverty, social exclusion and lower overall quality of life (Härkönen, 2017b; Kilkey & Bradshaw, 1999; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015). If not targeted by the welfare state policies, these families most likely become sites of accumulated disadvantages, which are transmitted between generations and might strengthen social inequalities (Bernardi & Boertien, 2016; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). However, single motherhood *per se* is not accountable for the risk of poverty and negative intergenerational outcomes; research proves that not the family structure, but mainly the lack of income and material hardship associated with 'separation penalty' lead to the negative long-term effects for mothers and children (McLanahan & Jacobsen, 2015). Obviously, not all women raising children alone are exposed to the similar degree of disadvantage, since they represent a heterogeneous group in regards to their education and social class standing (Härkönen, 2017b; Rowlingson & McKay, 2005). However, in many countries, the gap in education of single motherhood is large and/or growing, thus the increasing share of single motherhood concentrated at the bottom of educational ladder (Härkönen, 2017a) and exposed to the intensified risk of poverty and disadvantage. The penalty of single motherhood might be substantially mitigated by social policy measures. Generous, comprehensive and universal welfare state decreases the poverty of single-mother families, and the social policy context matters as much or even more for the wellbeing of single women with children than the individual characteristics (Brady & Burroway, 2012).

Although there is a large body of research on single-parent families, the majority of country-specific and comparative analyses focus on developed affluent countries (Brady & Burroway, 2012; Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Kilkey, 2000). So far only a few comparative studies with the focus on single motherhood included several Central European (Härkönen, 2017a; Study on Poverty, 2007) or

Baltic countries (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012; Van de Velde, Bambra, Van der Bracht, Eikemo, & Bracke, 2014), which in the last two decades underwent comprehensive economic upheaval and social reforms. After 1990 all CEE and the Baltic countries stepped into the path of market capitalism and had a challenge to re-define their inherited social security systems. The transition resulted in the rise of economic and social inequalities, poverty, unemployment and in the rolling back of social protection (Heyns, 2005). After less than two decades, in 2008–2009 all countries experienced a financial–economic crisis, which in the EU hit hardest the three Baltic states (Smith & Swain, 2010). In all three, the crisis was accompanied by the most radical austerity strategy (Sommers, Woolfson, & Juska, 2014), rolling back the social benefits (Kattel & Raudla, 2013), which already before the crisis were very thin if compared to other EU countries (Aidukaite, 2013). However, it needs to be stressed that the financial–economic crisis of 2008–2009 in the Baltics represents only one episode in more than two decades of the sweeping changes in the political economy and this essentially differentiates the region from other affluent democracies. Despite this prolonged ‘natural experiment’ there is apparent shortage of the thorough academic discussion on the outcomes of the post-socialist developments for such a vulnerable group of society as single-mother families.

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the field focusing on the Lithuanian case. We assess two components of the quality of life: material deprivation and the personal wellbeing of single mothers. The latter is covered by the analysis of emotional wellbeing, which is indicated by the absence of depressive feelings (DF) and by parenting-related stress. Our study is guided by the argument that single mothers are a heterogeneous group and, consequently, the outcomes of single motherhood are not uniform and therefore, moderated by the socio-economic and structural family-level factors. Considering the country-specific institutional setting, we expect significant disparities by education on all dimensions of life quality and the substantial protective effect of the higher education in regards to the material deprivation and emotional wellbeing of single mothers. Although generally, our main assumptions replicate the one widely appraised in the international scholarship, we nonetheless believe that the study contributes to the field in several ways.

First, in regards to the institutional context, Lithuania as a post-communist country represents an interesting case. Its welfare state is distinct through the combination of the liberal and conservative corporatist regime traits, but also through the extensive social security system and low levels of benefits (Aidukaite, 2013). Some observers conclude that it drifts towards the liberal-marginal regime (Guogis & Koht, 2009). As already mentioned, together with the two other Baltic countries, Lithuania went through the extremely radical liberal economic reforms after 1990 and in this regard significantly differed from the other five CEE countries, which joined the EU in 2004 (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007). The reforms in the Baltics brought the spectacular economic growth, which was manifest until 2008, but also larger social inequalities, less efficient welfare schemes, higher social exclusion. Moreover, after the last financial–economic crisis, Lithuania, differently from Estonia and Latvia, redirected the social security system towards

a more targeted model and adopted the least generous support system for families with children (Aidukaite, 2013; Aidukaite, Moskvina & Skuciene, 2016). In this study, we do not directly empirically test the impact of the institutional factors, but rather use the political economy as the contextual explanatory framework, which structures the life quality and the life chances of single-mother families. Second, our study contributes to the field while it assesses the quality of life in a multidimensional manner. The wellbeing is analysed considering simultaneously the material living conditions, emotional wellbeing and parenting-related stress; it thus provides a more complex perspective on the single mothers’ life quality. Third, we believe that the research has certain methodological relevance. The material penalty of single motherhood in many studies is measured based on the monetary indicators, such as the poverty risk (Brady & Burroway, 2012; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015). However, some argue that nonmonetary indicators more adequately grasp the material conditions (Tomlinson, Walker, & Williams, 2008) because they express the subjective perceptions of resources available and not the arbitrarily assigned thresholds/characteristics. In the presented study, we use novel subjective indicators of material wellbeing, which were developed for the purpose of this study. In addition, the study measures the personal wellbeing including the component of parental-related stress, which was also measured using the multi-item scale invented based on the results of the qualitative study.

The chapter is organised as follows. First, we give a broad overview of the demographic and social policy background of single-mother families in Lithuania. Second, we present the data and methods used in the following analysis. The following sections of the chapter are dedicated to the presentation of the results on the three components of single mothers’ wellbeing. Each of the three sections is structured in the following way: it opens with a brief overview of the existing evidence, is followed by the methodological remarks and afterwards presents the results of the empirical analysis. We begin with the material deprivation of single-mother families and uncover the factors contributing to vulnerability. Then the results on the absence of DF and predictors of lower emotional wellbeing are discussed. In the adjunct section, we focus on parental-related stress experienced by single mothers and reveal the protective factors. The chapter concludes with the summary of the main results and the discussion on the outcomes of single motherhood in the weak welfare state context.

4.2 Single Mother Families: Demographic and Social Policy Background

4.2.1 Demographic Trends and Structural Characteristics of Single Mother Families

Single-mother families with underage children are widespread in Lithuanian society; the prevalence of this family type in the country is among the highest in the EU and is similar to Ireland, UK and Nordic countries (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012). Single-mother families in Lithuania have a long-standing tradition and

could not be linked to the radical socio-economic changes which took place after 1990. They started to proliferate in the late 1960s after the liberalisation of the divorce legislation and grew in heterogeneity in the late 1990s when society progressed towards greater family complexity.

Throughout the twentieth century up till the 1970s single-mother families were formed largely as the outcome of widowhood or non-marital fertility. In the interwar period family life was the subject of religious legislation of the Roman Catholic Church; civil marriage registration was introduced in 1938, though, the civil family law was in full scope introduced only in 1940 (Juozapaitienė, 2011). The non-marital fertility rate, which in the more traditional context indicates the dominant path to single motherhood, was low throughout the whole interwar period and fluctuated at around 5–7% (Maslauskaite, 2014). The non-marital fertility rate remained more or less stable until the beginning of the 1990s with a short-term peak in the years immediately following WWII (Maslauskaite, 2014).

However, the situation was substantially altered at the end of 1965 with the liberalisation of the divorce legislation, which considerably decreased the social, financial and legal barriers of divorce (Maslauskaite & Baublyte, 2012). The reform was followed by a decade of secular growth in the divorce rates. In 1965 the crude divorce rate was 0.9 and a decade later, by 1977, it had reached 3.1 (Demographic Yearbook, 2016). Afterwards the divorce rates stabilised at the same high level placing Lithuania among the divorce leaders in the Soviet Union (Maslauskaite & Baublyte, 2012). They remained at the similarly high level till the recent period with the exception of a few very short-term fluctuations (Marriage and Divorce Statistics, 2016). The reached level places Lithuania among the front runners of divorce in the EU.

It needs to be noted that recently Lithuania also experienced a reversal in the socio-economic composition of divorce. Previously the higher union dissolution risk concentrated in the higher socio-economic status groups; however, currently the divorce risk is more pronounced in the population with lower socio-economical resources, and the trend is particularly evident in urban areas (Maslauskaite, Jasilioniene, Jasilionis, Stankuniene, & Shkolnikov, 2015). The reversal in the socio-economic composition of divorce also reinforces the socio-economic vulnerability of single motherhood.

In addition to the pre-existing paths to single motherhood, cohabitation and childbearing in cohabitation gained in importance after 1990. Cohabitation in Lithuania spread very rapidly in the second half of the 1990s and at the turn of the century it became the dominant path of family formation (Puur, Rahnu, Maslauskaite, Stankuniene, & Zakharov, 2012). However, the transition out of cohabitation into marriage became socially differentiated and as a result, the socio-economically disadvantaged groups manifested significantly lower rates of transition into marriage compared to the more advantageous (Maslauskaite & Baublyte, 2015).

The 2011 Census revealed that 22.5% of all families with children in Lithuania are single-mother families, who live in either independent or complex households (Stankūnienė, Baublytė, & Maslauskaitė, 2016). However, the

cross-sectional data did not accurately capture the extent of the phenomenon because single motherhood in many cases represents only a spell in the individuals' family trajectory. Evidence based on the retrospective partnership histories prove that around half (46%) of the Lithuanian women experienced the state of single motherhood at least once in their life course before the age of 50 (Fig. 4.1). Lithuania resembles the trend characteristic to Estonia (49%), France (41%) and the Czech Republic (46%) and together with them represents the most frequent manifestation of single motherhood among the EU countries and is very close to the trend in the US (Andersson, Thompson, & Duntava, 2016).

There is diversity of single mothers in regard to their marital status. Although divorce remains the dominant path into single motherhood (42.6%), almost one-third of single mothers are married, but live without a partner (29.4%) and 19.1% acquire the status never having married (Stankūnienė et al., 2016). A high share of married single mothers potentially could be explained by the very intense out-migration flows. Existing evidence reveals particularly vulnerable socio-economic positions and high dependency on the social protection system of the lower-educated, never-married single mothers. Social benefits are the main source of income for 40% of single women with children and among them particularly disadvantaged are never-married mothers, of whom every second is dependent on the social protection system (Stankūnienė et al., 2016).

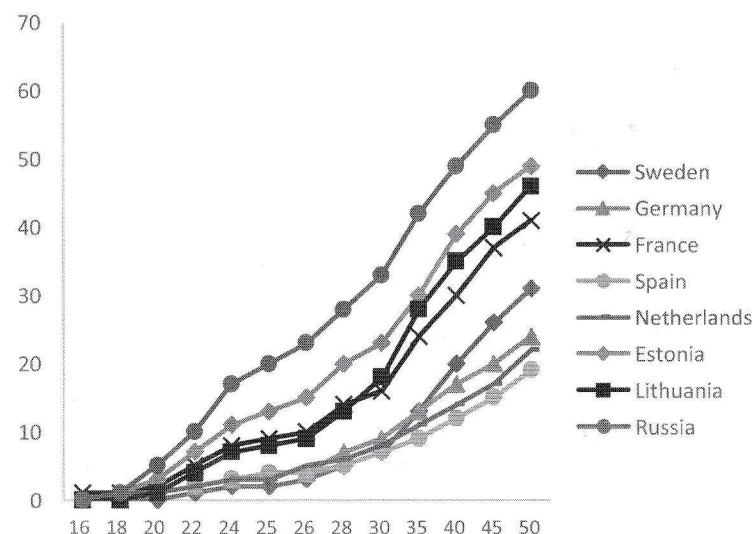


Fig. 4.1. Cumulative Percent ever 'Parent and not in a Union' (Single Mother), Women, Selected European Countries. *Source:* Andersson et al. (2016).

4.2.2 Single Mother Families: Poverty and Social Policy Responses

Single-mother families along with the two-parent families with three or more children are the most deprived households in Lithuania, and their poverty rate is almost twice as high as that for the general population (Income and Living Conditions 2015, 2016). Every second single mother with children lives at the risk of poverty. Overall during the last decade the situation did not change substantially, nonetheless, some dynamics could be distinguished. Single-mother families at-risk-of-poverty rates grew in 2008, the year the economic crisis showed the first signs, afterwards slightly decreased and started to grow again in 2012 (Fig. 4.2). During the last decade it fluctuated within the amplitude of 39–48%.

The role of social policy in buffering the poverty of single-mother families is very limited in the country (Ivaškaitė-Tamošiūnė, 2013). Moreover, differently from other household types, the effect of social transfers is negligible for single-mother families. For example, in 2015 the effect of social transfers on the poverty reduction amounted to 15 percentage points for two-parent families with three or more children, while for single-mother families – only three percentage points (Income and Living Conditions 2015, 2016). Poverty reduction through social transfers was most voluminous in 2009–2011, the years the economic crisis hit the hardest and immediately afterwards, but after 2012 it started to decrease very radically and reached the point where the social transfers have almost no effect on poverty reduction for this type of household. Currently, Lithuania's relative poverty rate for single mothers places the country close to Spain, Portugal,

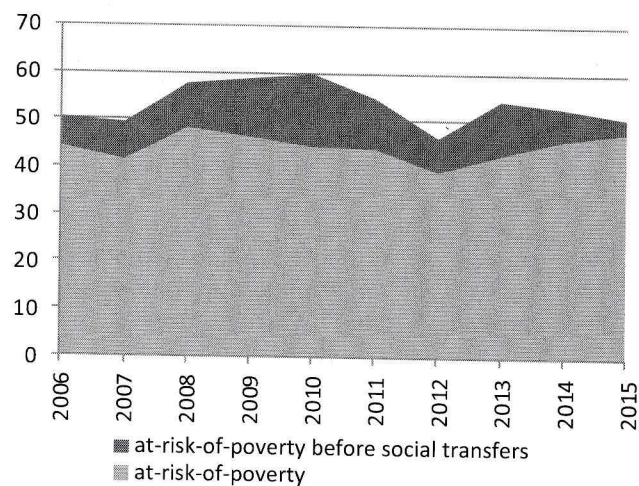


Fig. 4.2. Single Adult with at Least One Child, At-Risk-of-Poverty (before and after the Social Transfers), 2006–2015, Lithuania. *Source:* EU-SILC data. Data collected from annual publications on the results of EU-SILC in Lithuania Income and Living Conditions, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016.

Belgium and is somewhat lower than in the EU forerunning countries – the UK, Ireland, Hungary, where the rates reach 60% (Eurostat, 2016).

General developments of the social security system after the economic crisis had an unfavourable effect on the unprivileged groups including single mothers with children. Overall, Lithuania is among the EU countries with the lowest expenditures on the social protection as the share of GDP and in the period after the crisis the expenditures decreased reaching the lowest level of 11.1% (Government Expenditure on Social Protection, 2017). The post-crisis years are characterised by the retrenchment of almost all universal family benefits introduced in the pre-crisis period (2004–2008) and the redirection of the social security system towards a more targeted model (Aidukaite, 2013; Aidukaite et al., 2016). Social assistance for low income or poor families, which in many cases are single-mother families as it was noted above, is based on the means-tested benefits, but to be entitled for the benefits individuals or families have to pass not only the income tests, but also the property and the assets tests. Family support benefits, which include maternity, paternity, parental leave and sickness leave are earnings related and depend on the previous contributions to the Social Insurance Fund. Consequently, persons without previous social insurance contributions are eligible to the family support benefits on the means tested basis. Among the three Baltic countries, Lithuania, according to some scholars (Aidukaite, 2013), represents the least generous support system for families with children.

To sum up the contextual framework, single-mother families are widespread in Lithuania, nearly every fourth family with children is headed by a single mother. The country is among the forerunners in the EU according to the widespread of this family arrangement, which has been in place for more than four decades. However, recent demographic changes in cohabitation and union dissolution substantially altered the socio-economic background of single motherhood. Currently, socio-economically unprivileged women have lower chances to enter marriage after cohabitation, higher risk to bear a child out of marriage and experience higher risk to divorce. Thus, the coupling of family dynamics linked with the instability and inequalities in Lithuania resembles the one reported for such neoliberal welfare states as the US (Perelli-Haris & Lyons-Amos, 2015). Single-mother families are among the most deprived in Lithuania; nearly half of them live in poverty, and the poverty rate is twice as high as for the general population (Income and Living Conditions 2015, 2016). The welfare state plays a very marginal role in mitigating the vulnerability of these families. Moreover, in the post-crisis era the social security system took the direction towards a more targeted model and the overall reduction of the social assistance to the families with children, which sets up the disadvantageous institutional framework for women raising children alone.

4.3 Data and Methods

The results presented in the following sections of the chapter are based on the nationally representative 'Single Mothers and Social Exclusion in Lithuania

Survey' dataset. The survey was conducted in 2014. The unit of information was defined as single mother living without a partner, but with at least one underaged child in the household disregarding of her previous marital status. We surveyed mothers leading an independent household or living together with relatives or other persons. The sample included women who experienced divorce or union dissolution, widowhood or of the status of never having been in partnership. The total size of the sample was 600 respondents. The fieldwork was subcontracted and carried out by the public opinion and market research company Ltd 'Baltic Surveys'. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at the respondents' home. The questionnaire covered the retrospective partnership and fertility histories, child maintenance issues, non-resident father and child contacts, material living conditions, wellbeing of single mother and other issues related to the socio-economic resources of the family. The survey has several advantages compared to the existing datasets (i.e. EU-SILC or Generations and Gender Survey). First, it directly addresses single mothers and thus overcomes the limitations linked to the insufficient number of cases in the general population surveys. Second, the survey covers not only the material living conditions but also other aspects of the wellbeing of single mothers and thus complements the existing data sources. Third, material deprivation is operationalised, placing more emphasis on the component of basic leisure activities and cultural consumption, thus it grasps the deprivation in a more nuanced and country-sensitive manner.

As it was already mentioned, we focus on two components of single mothers' quality of life: material deprivation and personal wellbeing. The last is defined as the absence of negative feelings (depressive symptoms) and the absence of parenting-related stress. The questionnaire included three scales designed to measure each of the corresponding issues.

First, the Adapted Material Deprivation Scale (A-MDS) was used for the measurement of deprivation from goods and services. The A-MDS scale was developed on the basis of the EU MD 17 items scale (Boarini & d'Ercole, 2006; Measuring Material Deprivation in EU, 2012) and it includes items on exclusion from cultural and leisure consumption. This was motivated by the findings of the previously conducted qualitative study with single mothers and findings on the social meanings of a 'decent life' (Maslauskaitė, 2014). The A-MDS measured the self-assessed ability to improve housing conditions (to buy a larger apartment), to maintain adequate level of home heating, to eat meat/fish every other day, to buy new clothes, to buy new furniture, to have at least one week vacation abroad annually, to have at least one week holiday on the Lithuanian beach, to go to the sports club, to have dinner with children in the restaurant/café at least once a month, to go to the cinema, theatre, concert at least once a month.

Second, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies depression scale (CES-D 8) (Radloff, 1977) was employed to measure DF. The scale was previously used in Lithuania implementing the international longitudinal panel 'Generations and Gender Survey' (UNECE, 2005) and thus was validated and adapted for use in the Lithuanian general surveys. It measures some symptoms of depression, which along with others are used to diagnose clinical depression. The scale is self-reported inventory and records seven depression indicating feelings, which

might be experienced during the last week; each item is measured on a four-point scale.

Third, the Parenting-Related Stress scale (PRS) was used to measure the tensions which single mothers experience because of being the primary custodian of the child. The PRS scale was developed based on the results of the qualitative study with the single mothers in Lithuania (Maslauskaitė, 2014). The scale includes six items, each indicating the different components of the tension linked to the status of single carer and provider in the family. The items are: 'I regret that children grow up without a father', 'I am worried whether I will be able to provide for the education of the children', 'I feel exhausted because of the excess of the family responsibilities', 'I am anxious about falling ill and not being able to take care of my children', 'I hardly make ends meet', 'I have no time for myself'. Each item was measured on the five-point Likert scale.

In the analysis, we included a set of independent variables. The variables reflecting the structural position of single mothers were: education, measured in five categories (incomplete secondary, secondary, vocational, college and university); average monthly incomes per household member, measured in four categories based on income quartiles; place of residence, measured in five categories based on the population size in the settlement. In addition, we included variables on the single mothers' family situation and partnership characteristics. First, we considered the paths towards single motherhood and indicated single mothers who never lived with a partner, divorced, separated after cohabitation and widows. Second, we included the variable on the number of children in the family with three categories: one, two, three and more children. Third, based on the calendar information we calculated the age of the youngest child. Fourth, the variable on the time spent in the state of single motherhood was composed calculating the provided calendar information on the partnership history. In case there were several spells of single motherhood we considered the last one. The detailed information on the adjustment of the variables are provided in each of the following sections. We use the descriptive, one-way mean comparison (ANOVA) and regression analysis, which includes the models based on linear and logistic regression. The main set of control variables is used in each regression model; however, in some cases additional controls are introduced in order to establish the relevant predictors and strengthen explicative power of the models.

4.4 Single Mothers and Material Deprivation

Single motherhood is associated with poverty, which is linked to gender inequalities in the labour market, the gendered nature of care, lack of the spousal incomes and, in addition to it, in the case of divorce, by the loss of the economies of scale benefits (Sørensen, 1994). After union dissolution women are also often encountered by the non-payment of child maintenance by the non-resident father (Nepomnyaschy, 2007) and this in turn also has a negative effect on family resources and increases the risk of poverty. Poverty is multidimensional, thus the lack of financial resources reflects only one side of the vulnerability and

precariousness. Material deprivation is the other side of poverty and reflects limited opportunities to consume goods and services that are arbitrarily assigned as a necessary minimum standard for 'decent living' in the society. Material deprivation is also linked to the social exclusion and is often discussed as the objective side of it (Boarini & D'Ercole, 2006). In the following sections we discuss the components of material deprivation experienced by single mothers in Lithuania and also analyse the factors predicting the severity of material deprivation.

Fig. 4.3 displays the descriptive results of the A-MDS, which measures the subjectively assessed opportunities to consume daily goods, leisure and cultural activities. The majority of single mothers in Lithuania are unable to improve housing conditions (96%), to have at least one week vacation abroad (89%), to buy new furniture (86%) (Fig. 4.3). In addition, 72% report the inability to afford the sports club, 56% – to have at least one week holiday on the Lithuania seaside annually, 54% – to have dinner at a restaurant or café with children at least once a month. Half of the single mothers are excluded from the consumption of basic cultural goods and cannot afford the cinema, theatre or concert at least once a month. Every second single mother cannot buy new clothes. Least often reported form of material deprivation is related to the nutrition needs and heating.

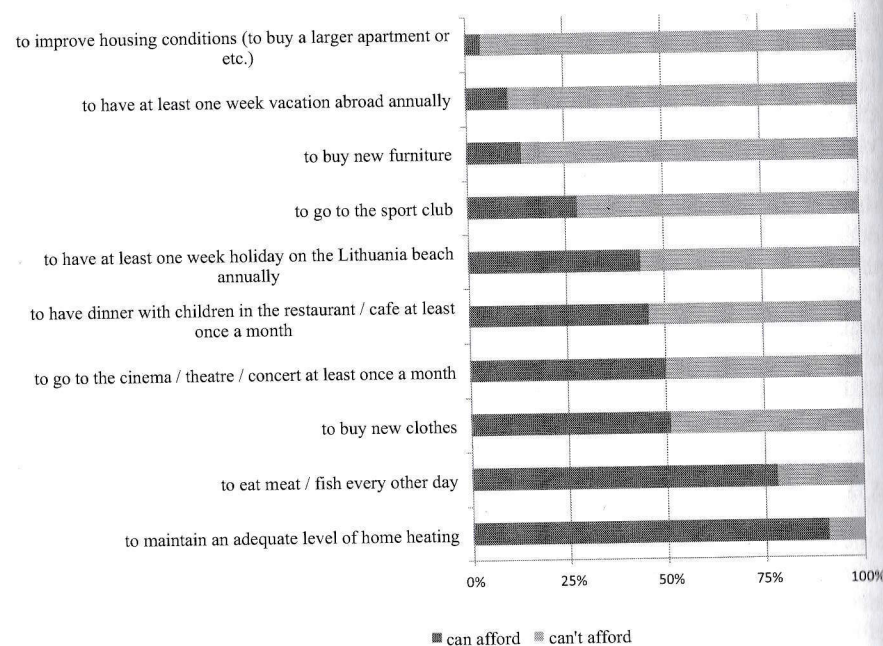


Fig. 4.3. Components of Material Derivation in Single Mother Households (in Percent). Source: Single mothers and social exclusion in Lithuania survey.

Consumption of meat and fish every other day is not feasible for 22% of single mothers. Nine percent of single mothers said that they cannot maintain an adequate level of home heating.

For further analysis the Index of Material Deprivation (IMD) has been composed from the A-MDS items. The two items with the one-sided distribution were removed from further analysis. The composite summary measure was created with the minimum value of 1, which indicates the state of no deprivation, and the highest value of 8, which signals the most intense deprivation. Overall, 17% of single mothers reported that they cannot afford any of the listed seven goods or services; an additional 32% declared the inability to afford five to six, consequently, almost half of the women have encountered severe exclusion from the socially acceptable way of life. On the contrary, there are 10% of single mothers who experience no material deprivation.

Single mothers are not a homogenous group and thus are exposed to different degrees of material deprivation depending on their socio-economic positions and structural characteristics of the household. Table 4.1 presents the mean values of IMD for various subgroups and results of the between-group comparison tests.

Material deprivation is negatively associated with the level of education ($r = -0.461$, $p < 0.001$). Highest mean values of IMD are observed for single mothers with incomplete secondary education; they gradually decline in every group of higher level of education and are the lowest for women with university education (Table 4.1). Although the negative association was expected and the result corroborates already reported findings in many previous studies (Brady & Burroway, 2012), one interesting issue is a very large difference in the IMD values between the lowest and the highest educational groups. Comparison between groups proves overall significant differences. The multiple comparison Scheffe tests indicate that university-educated women substantially differ in IMD mean values from all other educational groups, and similar results are for the college educated and groups with incomplete secondary education. There are no statistically significant differences between groups with secondary and vocational education.

Place of residence also markedly differentiates exposure to material deprivation. The largest deprivation is observed for women in rural areas and the lowest for those living in large cities (including the capital city and other large urban areas). The multiple comparison tests indicate significant difference only for rural single mothers; they experience much higher deprivation compared to all other areas of residence.

Household structure and paths to single motherhood are also associated with the level of material deprivation of single mothers. The results show that women living with three or more dependent children are exposed to much higher levels of material deprivation compared to those having only one or two children. The mean values for the last two groups are very close and lower than for single mothers with three or more children. Widows are also more deprived than divorced, separated or never-married women. However, multiple comparison tests prove that there are significant differences only between widows and the two other groups, while never-married single mothers and those who dissolved their unions do not differ in the level of material deprivation.

Table 4.1. Mean Values for Index of Material Deprivation. One-factor Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

	Mean	SD
<i>Level of education</i>		
Incomplete secondary	6.97	1.7
Secondary	5.67	1.8
Vocational	5.59	2.09
College	4.5	2.3
University	3.25	2.07
<i>F</i>	38.8***	
<i>Place of residence</i>		
Rural areas	6.0	2.03
Small towns	5.0	2.33
Other urban areas	3.98	2.26
Other two largest cities	4.21	2.29
Capital city	4.42	2.2
<i>F</i>	14.4***	
<i>Number of children</i>		
One	4.8	2.27
Two	4.9	2.38
Three and more	5.76	2.42
<i>F</i>	3.29*	
<i>Marital status</i>		
Never had a partner	5.06	2.39
Widow	5.72	2.02
Divorced, separated	4.78	2.34
<i>F</i>	4.41*	

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$.

Source: Single mothers and social exclusion survey.

In the next step we applied the multiple regression analysis in order to identify factors predicting severity of material deprivation and to eliminate the compositional effects of the individual variables. Table 4.2 depicts the results of the stepwise multiple regression models, in which we controlled for the women's education, place of residence, marital status in the previous partnership, number of children, time elapsed after the union dissolution and age of the mother and the youngest child. The results of the multiple regression analysis to a large extent confirm the descriptive analysis and show that statistically significant factors predicting the severity of material deprivation are women's education, place of

Table 4.2. Standardised Beta Coefficients for Index of Material Deprivation. Linear Regression Models.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education	-0.89***	-0.84***	-0.84***
Place of residence		-0.29***	-0.27***
Marital status (widow vs other)			0.97***
<i>R</i>	0.47	0.50	0.52
<i>R Square</i>	0.22	0.25	0.27

Note: (1) Additionally controlled: the youngest child's age, the time of the partnership break up, mothers age, number of children; (2) *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: Single mothers and social exclusion in Lithuania survey.

residence and marital status. All three models prove the inverse association between the level of education and the severity of material deprivation. The effect of residence is statistically significant, but the effect size is not so high. In the case of marital status, the only significant association is observed comparing widows with the other groups of marital status. Surprisingly, other factors linked with the household structure, i.e. number of children and the age of the youngest child, were not significant.

To sum, although the material deprivation of single-mother families is thoroughly examined in the literature, we believe that our results based on the A-MDS brings into perspective significant nuances on the disadvantages of the single-mother families. Inclusion of additional items reveals supplementary sides of single mothers' deprivation and, consequently, exclusion from the socially acceptable way of life, discursively defined as 'normal life'. Besides the deprivation from the improvement of the housing conditions, which is almost universal for Lithuanian single mothers, we observe high deprivation from the consumption of basic leisure and cultural activities. As it was expected, factors contributing to the severity of material deprivation are lower education, rural place of residence and being a widow, as it was proved by the regression analysis. A strong negative effect of education is sound if we consider the contextual factors linked with the welfare state developments in Lithuania. Means-tested welfare model, which was reinforced in the post-crisis period in the country, is counterproductive in assisting single mothers in need, as it has been proved for other countries (Kilkey & Bradshaw, 1999). In such a context, distinct through high commodification, the role of individual resources linked to the education becomes vital in securing the living conditions because the external assistance provided by the state plays only a marginal role.

4.5 Single Mothers' Personal Wellbeing

Single mothers fare worse on many aspects of personal wellbeing. They more frequently report general health problems (Burstrom et al., 2010), experience

higher risk of mental or psychiatric disorder (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003), states of fear or depression (Rousou, Kouta, Middleton, & Karanikola, 2013), negative thoughts and low self-esteem (Peden, Hall, Rayens, & Grant, 2005). Several hypotheses explain the lower outcomes of personal wellbeing of single mothers. One highlights the effect of material deprivation and poverty, which leads to long-term chronic stress (Mackenbach et al., 2008), the other points to the long-term stress caused by the burden of responsibilities to raise children alone (Brown & Moran, 1997). In addition, literature suggests that some women are perhaps more vulnerable to stress due to their personality (Cairney et al., 2003). Moreover, individuals differ in their capacities to adjust to the stressful events and to the long-term stress. Amato (2000) suggested the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment perspective and highlighted the role of the protective factors, which act as the 'shock absorbers and weakens the links between divorce-related events and people's experience of stress' (Amato, 2000, p. 1272).

In this section, we examine two components of personal wellbeing. First, we discuss DF, which represent the emotional dimension of personal wellbeing, and investigate factors contributing to the elevated risk of DF. As already discussed, we measure DF with the version of the CES-D 8 Scale (Radloff, 1977; UNECE, 2005). Afterwards, we examine the parenting-related stress, which marks the capabilities of women to cope with the responsibilities of being the single carer and provider in the family.

4.5.1 Depressive Feelings and Associated Factors

In the study, single mothers were asked to assess how often during the last week they had crying spells, felt fearful, felt depressed, felt sad, felt lonely, thought that their life was a failure or felt that even with help they would not be able to get rid of sadness. Generally, on each scale item 10–20% of single mothers in Lithuania reported a very frequent ('often, most or all of the time') manifestation of the symptoms, 35–55% experienced them sometimes and 30–50% reported they almost did not experience them ('seldom or never') (Fig. 4.4). However, there is a wide variation in the frequency of each depressive experience. The most frequently reported are feelings of loneliness, thoughts of life as a failure, feelings of sadness and DF. Around 60% of single mothers experienced them often or sometimes during the week preceding the interview. Least often are the depressive symptoms of crying spells and fear.

In the further step we computed the summary Depression Index (DI), with the minimum value of 0, indicating none of the DF, and the maximum value of 14, which signifies the highest frequency of DF. Based on the theoretical assumptions, we next considered several factors potentially contributing to the reduction of emotional wellbeing and linked to the socio-economic position of single mother (i.e. level of material deprivation (MDI) and education) (Amato, 2000). We also included measurements linked with the mother-child situation such as age of the youngest child. There is evidence that single mothers with young children are particularly vulnerable to depression (Rosman & Yoshikawa, 2001). Time spent

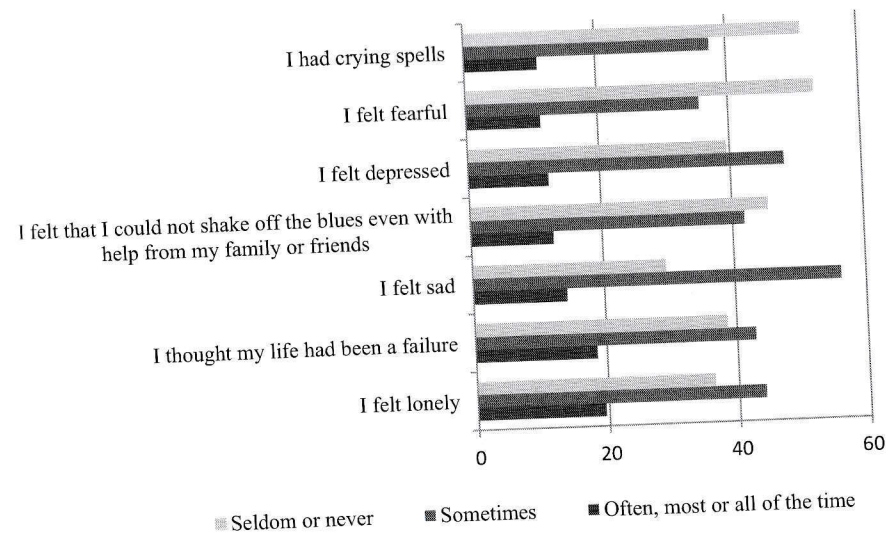


Fig. 4.4. Single Mothers' Psychological Wellbeing, Statements of Shorten Depression Scales (in Percent). *Source:* Single mothers and social exclusion in Lithuania survey.

Previous research suggests that with time people adapt to the stressful events linked to family transitions and return to normal functioning (Amato, 2000). Our analysis also takes into account the paths towards single motherhood, which could also be a significant predictor of the level of DF.

Table 4.3 presents the descriptive results of the DI mean values for various groups. Overall, the analysis indicates significant statistical differences in the mean values of the DI only for the socio-economic factors. The association between the DI and MDI is positive, i.e. more material deprivation is linked to more DF. Similar result is observed for the education: the higher the education, the lower is the level of the DI. Talking of the factors related to household structure, there is some variation of the DI mean values: single mothers with younger children exhibit higher mean values of the DI compared to mothers with older children. However, although the findings point into the expected direction, the differences between groups are not statistically significant. Similar results are for the effect of the path towards and the time spent in the state of single motherhood. Even if there are differences in the mean values, which point to the direction of the association we expected, the differences are not statistically significant.

In the further analysis we applied the multiple linear regression in order to estimate the predictors of the DF. We used all above-discussed variables and, wherever possible, transformed the categorical variables into the interval (time spent in the status of single motherhood and age of the youngest child). One categorical variable, i.e. marital status before single motherhood, was recorded as a dummy variable indicating widowhood versus all other statuses.

Table 4.3. Mean Values for Depression Index. One-factor Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

	Mean	SD
<i>Material deprivation index</i>		
1 (no deprivation)	2.77	3.50
2	2.69	2.59
3	4.36	3.58
4	4.63	3.37
5	4.94	3.58
6	5.65	3.63
7	6.65	3.89
8 (very high deprivation)	7.55	4.31
<i>F</i>	9.95***	
<i>Level of education</i>		
Incomplete secondary	6.15	4.9
Secondary	6.17	3.7
Vocational	5.36	3.7
College	4.09	3.9
University	4.15	3.5
<i>F</i>	5.319***	
<i>Age of the youngest child</i>		
Less than 3 years	5.4	4.3
4–6 years	5.5	3.8
7–11 years	4.5	3.7
12–18 years	4.4	3.7
<i>F</i>	3.37	
<i>Marital status</i>		
Never had a partner	5.41	3.9
Widow	5.35	3.8
Divorced, separated	4.78	3.8
<i>F</i>	2.4	
<i>Time spent in the status of the single motherhood</i>		
Less than 4 years	5.13	3.95
5–9 years	4.62	3.68
10 and more	4.69	3.93
<i>F</i>	0.71	

Table 4.4. Standardised Beta Coefficients for Depression Index. Linear Regression Model.

	Standardised Beta Coefficients
Material deprivation	0.38***
Education	n.s
Youngest child age	n.s
Time spent in the single mother state	n.s
Widow vs other	n.s
<i>R</i>	0.48
<i>R Square</i>	0.2

Source: Single mothers and social exclusion in Lithuania survey.

Overall, the results of the regression analysis presented in Table 4.4 corroborate the already discussed descriptive results. The statistically significant predictor of DF experienced by single mothers is the level of material deprivation, if we control for other factors such as education, age of the youngest child and time spent in the state of single motherhood. The association between the two variables is positive, and higher levels of material deprivation predict higher levels of DF in the population of single mothers. This is fully in line with the previous findings (Van de Velde et al., 2014) and supports the idea on the link between depression and long-term stress caused by chronic material disadvantages. Interestingly, that material deprivation was the only significant predictor for the elevated levels of DF. Contrary to our expectations, we did not find any support for the protective effect of education. We anticipated that education is not only the proxy for the economic resources, but also for the stress-coping skills because the higher educated have better communication skills, higher cognitive abilities and thus could better adjust (Wang & Amato, 2000). In addition, our analysis did not support the previous evidence on the effect of the youngest child's age, time spent in the state of single motherhood and path towards the status of single mother on the level of DF.

4.5.2 Parenting-Related Stress

As it was already mentioned, lower personal wellbeing of single mothers could be associated with the long-term stress caused by lone parenting (Pryor & Trinder, 2004). Women raising children alone suffer from the overload of the responsibilities linked with being the single carer and provider; they also in severe ways experience the competing demands of working and family life.

The needs to compensate economic losses linked to single motherhood often require to increase the working time and thus, to decrease time spent on parenting. Obviously, this is reflected in the research findings on parenting

outcomes. They suggest that single parents often struggle to monitor and supervise the activities of children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 2002); they are more inclined to use negative parenting strategies (Braver & Lamb, 2013). Parenting-related stress could also be affected by contextual factors, such as the normative expectations towards the post-divorce parenting, non-resident fathers' involvement in child rearing and also by the legal framework, which could encourage fathers' involvement.

In the following, we discuss the parenting-related stress and contributing socio-economic factors linked with the single mother. As noted above, the measurement is based on the six-item PRS scale developed for the purpose of the study and based on the results of the qualitative study with single mothers in Lithuania (Maslauskaitė, 2014).

Fig. 4.5 presents the frequency distribution for each item of the PRS scale. Most frequently reported component is linked to the cognitive dissonance between the normative model of two parents' family and the biographical situation of single mother. A total 63% reported having negative feelings because their children grow in a single-mother family. Against the backdrop of the long tradition of divorce and relatively loose attitudes to it (Maslauskaitė & Baublytė, 2012) we could speculate that this in the first place echoes the sense of loss in the life chances and life quality of the children and not the possible stigmatisation. The majority of women (57%) also expressed concerns regarding their own financial capacities to secure the children's future education. Thus, they negatively assess the current and prospective financial situation, which could have a

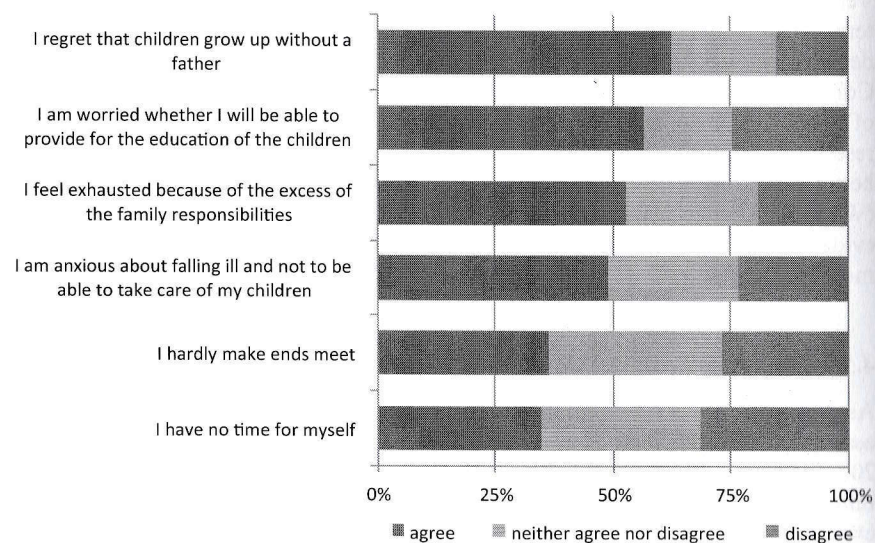


Fig. 4.5. Assessment of the Parenting Stressors (in Percent).
Source: Single mothers and social exclusion in Lithuania survey.

substantial impact on the educational chances and life prospects of children in the context of the neoliberal educational policies introduced in the country in the post-crisis period. In addition, around every second single mother (53%) suffers negative emotional outcomes linked to being the single carer; thus the excess of care responsibilities for the majority of women is a relevant source of stress. A similar share reported the care-related stress associated with the prospective health risks and their effect on the mothering capabilities. Every second mother felt anxiety to fall ill and not being able to perform as the primary carer. Around one-third of single mothers experience stress because of the limited opportunities to spend some time for their personal needs. Being a single provider for the children also causes additional stress to the mothers, thus almost every third reports the tensions caused by the inability to make ends meet.

What factors contribute to the elevated level of PRS? To answer this, we first developed the compositional variable based on the results of the cluster analysis for the PRS items. Two groups were composed, the first indicates no-experience of the PRS (value 0) and the second – suffering moderate or high PRS (value 1). In the logistic regression analysis, we included several control variables. The existing evidence suggests that poverty is an essential predictor for the emotional wellbeing of single mothers (Van de Velde et al., 2014). Thus, we incorporated into the model the income-based indicator. Four quartile income groups were subtracted. In addition, the control variable measuring mothers' education was included because higher education leads not only to higher financial resources and less overall vulnerability, but also because it indicates higher cognitive abilities and skills to manage parenting stress. We also considered such factors as the place of residence, number of children, age of the youngest child, as well as several life course factors – time spent in the state of single motherhood, last partnership status. All variables were included in the logistic regression model. The odds ratios are presented in the Table 4.5.

The results of the logistic regression prove the strong negative association between the manifestation of the PRS and the financial situation of the single-mother families. Women belonging to the two lowest income quartile groups exhibit around five times higher odds ratio to report the PRS compared to the women from the highest income quartile group. However, there is no statistically significant difference in the PRS manifestation between the two highest income groups. Thus, poverty is a strong predictor for the elevated risk of mothering stress and this finding is in line with the previous results on the outcomes of poor financial conditions on the emotional wellbeing of single mothers (Avison, Ali, & Walter, 2007). Higher level of education has a protective effect on the single mothers' personal wellbeing, while lower education increases the odds to experience the PRS. Lower personal wellbeing is more pronounced for the lowest group of education: women with incomplete secondary education have more than four times higher odds to report the PRS compared to the highest, i.e. university educated, single mothers. The odds ratios for the secondary and vocational education also indicate a higher propensity to experience the PRS compared to the university-educated women. Again, the finding corroborates the existing almost universal evidence on the educational disadvantage and higher exposure to

Table 4.5. Odds Ratios for Parenting-related Stress.

	Exp (B)
<i>Level of education</i>	
University (ref.)	
College	1.6
Vocational	3.42**
Secondary	3.37**
Incomplete secondary	4.52**
<i>Income group</i>	
Highest (291 € >) (ref.)	
High to moderate (221–290 €)	1.8
Moderate to low (161–220 €)	5.1***
Lowest (<160 €)	5.48***
<i>Last partnership status</i>	
Marriage, cohabitation (ref.)	
Never married, without partner	0.28
Widow	7.7***
<i>R</i>	0.25
<i>R square</i>	0.34

Note: (1) additionally controlled for number of children, age of the youngest child, time in the single motherhood status; all predictors are not significant. (2) the model classifies 86% of cases with high parental stress and 59% of no parental stress cases; describes 76% of the total variation. (3) *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.05$.

Source: Single mothers and social exclusion in Lithuania survey.

stress, which has been proved at the cross-country level (Van de Velde et al., 2014). An additional significant predictor of the PRS is the path towards single motherhood. Widows experience a substantially higher risk of the PRS compared to divorced or separated mothers. Interestingly, never-partnered single mothers have lower risk to experience the PRS compared to the divorced or separated; however, the finding is not supported by the significance test. Higher exposure of widows to the PRS seems reasonable because individual adjustment to the role of the single mother is marked by a substantial difference compared to divorce. Divorce ends unsatisfactory relationships and is the process which precedes the event of union dissolution, while the death of the partner at a young or middle age is more likely to be a sudden event, which might end a high-quality marital relationship. Moreover, widowhood is among the most crucial stressful life events

and as it is well documented it has a very strong impact on health and emotional outcomes (Avison et al., 2007). Contrary to the expectations, we did not find any effect on the PRS of child-related factors (age and number of children) and time spent in single motherhood. We believe that this highlights the essential role of financial and personal resources, the latter linked with the education, in moderating the PRS. If these resources are available, the situational stress linked with the changing demands caused by child's developmental tasks are managed and do not bring tensions into the emotional life of the mother.

4.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the single mothers' quality of life focusing on the material and subjective dimensions of wellbeing in the context, which is distinct through the marginal role of the welfare state in mitigating the risks associated with single motherhood. The leading argument of the research suggests that single mothers are a heterogeneous group and, consequently, the outcomes of single motherhood are not uniform and therefore moderated by socio-economic and structural family-level factors. Considering the country-specific institutional setting, we expected significant disparities by education on all dimensions of life quality and the substantial protective effect of the higher education in regards to the material deprivation and emotional wellbeing of single mothers. Our study is based on the results of the cross-sectional representative survey with women raising children alone. The research contributes to the field, while it adds evidence on the single motherhood disadvantage from Lithuania, an EU country, which represents the transitional society, but also which together with two other Baltic countries was hit the hardest by the 2008–2009 financial–economic crisis (Smith & Swain, 2010) and reacted to the crisis executing the most radical austerity strategy (Sommers et al., 2014). In addition, the study also raises methodological issues on the measurement of the material deprivation and personal wellbeing.

Contextual analysis proves that single-mother families are on high prevalence in Lithuania; the country is among the leaders in the EU (Chzhen & Bradshaw, 2012). The trend had been in place for more than a half of a century, although the socio-economic composition of and paths to single motherhood were substantially altered by the comprehensive societal and demographic changes of the last two decades. Socio-economic vulnerability is positively associated with the chances to move into single motherhood, since marriage, non-marital childbearing and divorce become increasingly socially differentiated (Maslauskaite & Baublyte, 2015; Maslauskaite et al., 2015; Perelli-Harris & Lyons-Amos, 2015, 2016). To a large extent these processes might be associated with the emergence of an extremely radical neoliberal capitalism (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007), which was accompanied by a very thin social protection system. The financial–economic crisis of 2008–2009 conditioned the rolling back of the expenditures on the social protection and the retrenchment of all universal family benefits introduced in pre-crisis period, strengthening the means-targeted model and reduction in the social assistance to families with children (Aidukaite, 2013; Aidukaite et al., 2016). As a

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Part II

Families' Strategies against Economic Hardships