

Single Parents Needs Assessment

To understand the needs of single-parent families in order for Rotary FSC to respond appropriately to their needs in terms of programme provisions, a needs assessment was conducted between April and May 2016. Rotary FSC reached out to 44 clients, who consented to participate in the survey to understand their needs as a single parent. The survey researched on the basic demographics of single parents, their areas of concern and its importance in their situation, their concerns for their children, their expectations of Rotary FSC as a support agency as well as their interest to participate in future programmes. The outcomes of the survey are summarized below.

Demographic of Respondents:

1. Category of Single Parents:

The survey found that more than 75% of respondent were single parents due to marital related issues such as divorce or separation. Unwed parents formed the next most common group of respondents with 11.4%.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Divorced	24	54.5
Widowed	2	4.5
Married but living apart	10	22.7
Spouse in prison	3	6.8
Single (never married)	5	11.4
Total	44	100.0

2. Age:

Majority of the respondents were in their 40s and early 50s.

Age Group	Frequency	%
20-24	4	9.8
25-29	4	9.8
30-34	4	9.8
35-39	3	7.3
40-44	9	21.9
45-49	10	24.4
50-54	6	14.6
55-59	1	2.4
Total	41	100%

Missing Data: 1

3. Gender:

The ratio of female to male respondents was 10:1.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	40	90.9	90.9	90.9
Male	4	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

4. Ethnicity:

More than half of the respondents were Malays and a quarter of them Indians. Chinese single parents formed less than 20% of the sample.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Chinese	8	18.2
Malay	23	52.3
Indian	11	25.0
Others	2	4.5
Total	44	100.0

5. Religion:

Approximately 60% of the respondents were Muslims and approximately 15% were Christians.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Islam	27	61.4
Buddhism/Taoist	3	6.8
Hindu	4	9.1
Christianity	6	13.6
Others	4	9.1
Total	44	100.0

6. Employment Status:

It was found that the majority of the single parents were gainfully employed whether on part time or full-time basis. A significant 31.8% of them were unemployed.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Permanent Full-time	15	34.1
Contract Full time	3	6.8
Any form of part-time	12	27.3
Unemployed	14	31.8
Total	44	100.0

7. Living Arrangement:

90% of the single parents lived with their children. Slightly above 20% of them received support from their mothers and approximately 10% from their fathers.

Living Arrangement	Frequency
Children	40
Mother	9
Father	5
Siblings	4
Friends	3
Husband/ ex-husband	2
Relatives	2
Stepchildren	2
Grandparents	1
Step-parents	1
By his/her own	1

8. Number of Children:

75% of the respondents had between 1 and 3 children.

No. of children	No. of participants
1	10
2	12
3	11
4	8
5	1
6	1
7	0
8	1
Total:	44

9. Age of Children:

A significant number of children were in their teens and pre-adulthood while the primary-school goers formed 31% of all the children whose parent were surveyed.

Age group	No. of children
Below 6	13
6-11	31
12-17	41
18 or above	37

10. Household Income:

More than 70% of the respondents' household income were less than \$2,000.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No income	5	12.5
Below 1K	11	27.5
\$1,001 – 1,500	10	25.0
\$1,501-2,000	9	22.5
\$2,001 – 2,500	2	5.0
\$2,501-\$3,000	1	2.5
Above 3K	2	5.0
Total	40	100.0

Missing Data: 4

11. Home Ownership:

Approximately 60% resided in public rental flats and slightly less than 30 % owned their flats.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
HDB rental under my sole/joint name	24	54.5
HDB rental under others name	4	9.1
HDB purchased flat under my sole/joint name	8	18.2
HDB purchased flat under other's name	5	11.4
Rented room or flat in open market	1	2.3
Private property	1	2.3
Others	1	2.3
Total	44	100.0

Problems Faced in the Process of Becoming Single Parents

1. Overview

We asked respondents to indicate whether they had experienced some common problems of single-parent households, and to rank the importance of these problems to them. We then asked the respondents to elaborate on their experience of these problems.

The results showed that the top most important concern that single parents faced was housing followed by financial and emotional issues. Interestingly, housing issue was the least of their concerns at the time of survey, possibly because it was one of the earliest issue that had already been dealt with given its high level of importance to them.

Types of Issues	No. of respondent having this problem (After becoming a single parent)	%	Missing	Score of importance*
Housing	22	51.2	1	2.62
Legal	19	43.2	NIL	2.13
Financial	42	97.7	1	2.50
Parenting	25	58.1	1	2.16
Getting Support	28	70.0	4	2.23
Emotions	29	67.4	1	2.31
Others: Medical	2	N/A	N/A	N/A

* average score using 'not important' as 1, 'important' as 2 and 'very important' as 3. Range is 1 to 3.

2. Types of housing issues

The most common obstacle respondents faced was related to HDB housing policy such as the 30-month debarment and two chances for subsidized housing.

Types of Housing Issues	No.	%
Housing Policies	13	31
Insufficient CPF/ Money to purchase	4	9.5
On long waiting list	2	4.8
Issues related to current accommodation (e.g. overcrowded)	3	7.1
Strained relationship with those living together	3	7.1

Missing Data: 2

3. Types of legal issues

The most common legal issue faced was child maintenance.

Types of Legal Issues	No.	%
Maintenance of children	12	27.3
Access to legal resources	6	13.6
Custody Issues	3	6.8
Legislation Issues	3	6.8

4. Types of financial issues

Most common reasons for having financial difficulties were insufficient income and high expenses.

Types of Financial Issues	No.	%
Insufficient income	29	69.0
High expenses	23	54.8
Debts	9	21.4
Big family	7	16.7
High monthly housing payment	7	16.7
Difficulty getting or sustaining a job	6	14.3
Medically unfit for work	5	11.9
Financial assistance rejected	3	7.3
Caregiving arrangement	3	7.1
Breadwinner in prison	2	4.8
Citizenship status	2	4.8
Non-contributing family members	1	2.4
Medical expenses	1	2.4

5. Types of parenting issues

The most common parenting issue was managing changes in children's behavior following divorce and during the marital breakdown.

Types of Parenting Issues	No	%
Change in children's behaviour	17	39.5
Child's emotional issues	8	18.6
Insufficient time/energy for children	5	11.6
Lack of skills	4	9.3
Unconducive learning environment	3	7.0
Unable to cope alone	2	4.7
Lack of information or knowledge	1	2.3
Dependent adult children	1	2.3

Missing Data: 1

6. Types of support issues

Most common reason for the lack of support was the lack of understanding from family/community about their circumstances.

Types of Support Issues	No.	%
Lack of understanding from family/ community	12	31.6
Little/ no support from formal support system	9	23.7
Little/no support from informal support system	9	23.7
Prefers to keep issues to self and be independent	5	13.2
Unsure who/where to approach	2	5.3
Feeling embarrassed	1	2.6

Missing Data: 6

7. Types of emotional issues

The top 2 most common feelings that respondents experienced were stress and depression.

Types of Emotional Issues	No.	%
Stressed	14	35.0
Depression	10	25.0
Lonely	6	15
Frustration	4	10.0
Helpless	4	10
Anxiety	3	7.5
Anger	3	7.5
Guilt	2	5.0
Shame	1	2.5
Tired	1	2.5

Missing Data: 4

Help and Support

1. Sources of Help

Formal support was the main source of support for the respondents. Slightly more respondents received support from friends than relatives.

Sources of Help	No. of participants used it	%
FSC	29	69.0
SSO/CDC	28	66.7
MOE	22	52.4
Friends	18	42.9
Siblings or relatives	15	35.7
MP	14	33.3
CDAC/Mendaki/ SINDA	14	33.3
Own parents	12	28.6
Counseling centers	11	26.2
Ministry (e.g. childcare subsidies)	8	19.0
In-laws	6	14.3
Employment agencies e.g. e2i, WDA	6	14.3
Neighbours	3	7.1
SCWO/ LAB	3	7.1
Others: Church	1	2.4
Others: Random person giving food	1	2.4

Missing Data: 2

2. Types of FSC Help

Survey found that single parents expected Rotary FSC to provide support in terms of information, infrastructure, psychoeducation, parenting assistance and had least expected the FSC to provide financial aid.

Types of FSC Help	No. of participants	%
Provide information	32	76.2
Provide a safe and relaxed place for yourself and your children	28	66.7
Provide emotional support	26	61.9
Improve parenting skills	23	54.8
Help my children cope with school work	21	50.0
Help my children cope with changes in the family	20	47.6
Introduce you to new friends	18	42.9
Provide chances to learn from others	18	42.9
Provide volunteer opportunities	18	42.9
Financial Support	3	7.1

Missing Data: 2

Interest in Programmes

We asked the respondents to indicate if they were interested to join our programmes. Thirty-one respondents (79.5%) indicated interest. The remaining respondents cited other commitments and medical issues as reasons for not being able to join future programmes.

Of those who were interested, most of them indicated availability on Saturdays and Sundays to attend programmes. Ten indicated requiring childcare services.

Children's Needs

In this part of our study, we were looking to understand children's needs based on their parents' feedback.

1) Observed difficulties children faced in coping with family changes

35.7% of all respondents observed that their children had difficulty coping in a single-parent household. Among the difficulties, coping with emotions seemed to be more prominent, with over 20% of our respondents observed that in their children.

2) Concerns for children

72.5% of our respondents were concerned about their children after being a single-parent. The most common concern is school-related followed by behavioral and emotional.

Types of Concerns	No.	%
School-related	8	19.5
Behavioural concerns	5	12.2
Emotional concerns	5	11.9
Medical concerns	4	9.8
Financial concerns	4	9.5
Values -related	3	7.3
Lack of father figure	3	7.3
Children's future	3	7.3
General wellbeing	2	4.9
Insufficient familial support	2	4.9
Family bonding	1	2.3

Missing Data: 3

3) Interest in programmes for children

67.6% of respondents indicated their interest in enrolling their children in FSC programmes in the future. The most popular programme topic suggestion was school-related programmes such as tuition or study skills.

Most respondents claimed that their children aged between 7 and 11 years old were more available over the weekends, especially in the afternoon, to participate in programme.

Summary of findings and implications

Demographic

Most of our single-parent families were single mothers with school-aged children. For them, divorce was the main reason for single-parenthood. They were equally likely to be employed full-time, part-time or unemployed. Their family income was about \$2,000 or less. More than 60% of them lived in HDB rental flats, either with their child/children or with another adult family member.

Needs and Concerns

Our respondents were more concern with housing, financial and emotional issues. Among these needs, housing issues were the most important, but were also likely to be solved first. Financial problems seemed to be more on-going, with only one income earner in the family. Besides low income and high living costs, one-fifth of our respondents had debt problems as well.

Respondents also had difficulties dealing with the emotional turmoil of divorce. A number of them experienced stress, depression and loneliness. They also faced difficulties dealing with their children's changes in behavior.

Besides FSC, SSO, MOE, friends, siblings, relatives and MPs were also commonly engaged to support them with their coping. Respondents expected FSC to provide information and emotional support for them, and to support their children in coping with the changes.

Concerns for Children

This study showed that respondents were concerned about their children's coping with the changes in the family. One-fifth of our respondents observed that their children had difficulties coping emotionally. They were mainly concern about the impact on school performance and behavior of their children.

Respondents' Interest in Future Programmes

Most respondents were interested in participating in FSC programmes in the future. They were more likely to be available over the weekend.

Nearly 70% of them were also interested in enrolling their children to join our programmes. They were more interested in programmes related to schooling. Again, the children were more available over the weekends to participate in programmes.

Implications

Although housing and financial problems were their main concerns, single parents mainly sought help from other resources such as SSO, friends, family and MP. FSC was seen as a source of information on resources and skills. Besides parents' own informal network, FSC was the best platform to provide support emotionally. As such, FSC should continue to provide support emotionally and in terms of information and resources.

Looking at the family composition of our respondents, most of them resided with their children. There was a significantly big group of teenage children, in which the FSC had not been providing direct support. It was also observed through this study that our respondents wanted more support for their children's school. It was understandable as this group of parents were often busy sustaining the family financially, resulting in a significant reduction in time to guide and understand their children. Supporting the children in these families could in turn help in supporting the parents.

Most respondents were available during the weekends, when they should be spending time with their children. This showed that our programmes needed to cater the needs of both parents and their children and to enhance the quality of their time together, so that the family as a whole would benefit from coming to FSC during the weekends compared to just staying at home.

Some initial program ideas generated from this study:

- Regular talks to provide information on community resources around housing, finance and legal issues;
- Support group or developmental group to provide emotional support;
- Parenting skills and skills on attending to children's emotion;
- More children's programmes to support school performance and life skills; and
- More family bonding activities.