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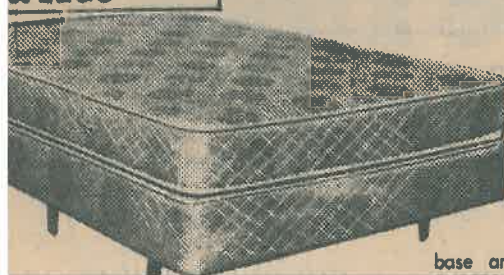


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Illustrated above
Spanish style 5-piece bedroom setting with 16 drawer capacity. Large 120cm dresser with a full-sized framed mirror, a matching 120cm long lowboy plus two 2-drawer bedside cabinets and a double headboard. Eye catching wood mould finish. Fantastic value!

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ALL 3-pce LOUNGE Queen Anne, Colonial, Con-

Difference between solo and single



by **valerie davis**

What is a solo mother and what is a single mother?

The precise definition of these terms becomes a matter of urgency after the findings on single mothers published in Christchurch last week.

A single mother is a woman who has never been married, while a solo mother is one who has, and is widowed or divorced.

In fact, widows further complicate the matter by asking for special provisions, as opposed to all solo mothers, implying that divorced mothers don't have the same sort of needs and problems.

I suppose it depends which category one belongs to as to whether these sorts of differences matter. The important distinction to draw between the single and the solo mothers is that they really do have different sets of problems and circumstances to cope with.

The Christchurch study makes the claim that children of single mothers do tend to be deprived and suffer in a number of different ways because of their circumstances.

The trouble is that the study did not make it clear that children from solo parent families are not included in this category, and are NOT necessarily deprived.

The single mother situation is a murky one. Of course, there are mature, responsible, caring mothers among them who are doing a great job in bringing up their child, or children, single-handed.

The real problem are the immature teenage mothers who may lack the family resources and emotional stability to tackle a job like parenting, which demands greater and greater amounts of maturity and financial stability as well as the

emotional, mental and spiritual qualities.

The Norman Kirk Administration changed the structure of social benefits, and probably of society, when they made the Domestic Purposes Benefit a statutory one — which meant that all solo mothers who fulfilled the Social Welfare requirements should be able to draw a benefit in order to support their children.

What no-one did then, was to read the reports on single mothers and their children which were being published in Britain at the same time. They read in exactly the same terms as the Christchurch report, listing the deprivations and problems of such mothers and their children.

But these British reports went further. They pointed to the cause of the problem and how the problem could be overcome in future. In fact, the British haven't done anything about it either, but the information was available, and the problems of the '80s were clearly obvious from these reports back in the early '70s.

The root of the single mother's problems, said the overseas reports, lay in money and housing. It is not enough to supply just enough money to exist on the breadline, which is what a benefit is.

If a girl is to make a success of bringing up her baby, much more needs to be done than merely dole out the money.

First we all now know that ante-natal care is as important as post-natal care. We know that stress on a pregnant mother produces a baby pre-disposed to problems. So as soon as a girl knows she is pregnant, and applies for a benefit, the State should spring into action.

In exchange for the benefit the

girl should be required to report regularly to ante-natal centres, which should provide not just medical care, but counselling, parenting technique classes and the opportunities to meet other young mothers so isolation does not also become a problem.

After birth these services should provide after-care and constant back-up until the child starts school and after, if need be.

Parenting is a skill. People learn to type, drive, even to make love. So we should teach our young people the skills of parenting as well as giving them a benefit.

Another aspect of the single mother situation is one which has received very little mention, but is a problem most social workers are aware of.

This is the "doll" syndrome. Many teenagers when they first have their baby are enchanted with it. But by the time the baby is two and needing the sort of mature consistent attention which all toddlers need, the teenager finds she hasn't the emotional resources to cope. Not only that, but she wants to get back into the teenage swim again, free to go out to dances, cinema and so on. At this stage the two-year-old often goes into care, is fostered or adopted, and has had the worst possible start to his young life.

What the Christchurch report means is that we can no longer just hand out the benefit and shut our eyes to the consequences.

We must accept that to provide the barest means of living — money and perhaps a Statehouse — is not enough. It is like giving soup and improving tracts to the poor in another century.

We must provide real back-up services, counselling and moral support for the young teenage mother who is prepared to accept her responsibilities, but is not old enough to cope on her own. That, to me, is the only reasonable response to that report from Christchurch.

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