

SUBMISSION FROM AMEN TO THE CRISIS PREGNANCY AGENCY

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"You can't have a father without a child; you can't have a child without a father"
Reb Anderson, 1998:144.

AMEN is a voluntary organisation dealing with a range of issues experienced by men – domestic abuse, poverty, relationship problems, homelessness, family difficulties etc. Since its inception in 1997, approx. 25,000 men have contacted the group to seek help and support. The ethos of the group targets the elimination of discrimination against men/fathers and campaigning for men and women to work together, on an egalitarian basis, to overcome and deal with a variety of social and family problems, including crisis pregnancies. A substantial number of those who have contacted us are:

- men who are at risk of fathering crisis pregnancies;
- fathers in crisis pregnancies;
- men who are consciously and purposely deprived of and denied a relationship with their children;
- fathers who have been excluded from any decision-making on the future of pregnancies, planned and unplanned, desired or undesired.

"Men feel deeply moved by the experience of childbirth. Nine out of ten fathers attend the delivery of their babies these days. Not only is this a miraculous event, it also is remembered by many dads as a time when they feel an intense commitment which becomes lasting."

Charlie Lewis and Jo Warin, 2001:3.

"Crisis pregnancy means a pregnancy which is neither planned nor desired by the woman concerned, and which represents a personal crisis for her"

The terms of reference of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA), as indicated in your website, focus exclusively on women/mothers. The words 'men' and 'fathers' do not even appear anywhere in your information sources. Given the obvious role that men play in crisis pregnancies, this is an incredible omission and a further manifestation of the dominance of women-focused health care services. (Indeed, a survey carried out in the UK this week showed that 81% of the sample believed that 'men have been marginalized by the NHS'.) The reality of your Agency's agenda is such that you have purposely and consciously excluded 50% of those who contribute to and are

affected by crisis pregnancies and thus, you have reduced by the same proportion the potential for success.

“The paternal presence is a vital, life-giving force in the lives of children and families. Although we have made some progress in understanding the impact of paternal absence on children, we must now begin to understand, define and appreciate the meaning of paternal presence”.

Kyle D. Pruett, 1993:50.

Your stated aims include reducing the number of crisis pregnancies and abortions and providing counselling and medical services. However, you identify no role whatsoever for men and fathers in achieving these aims. This beggars belief since pregnancies require the active participation of a male and a female. No child has ever been born to a lone parent:

- There is therefore responsibility on, and roles for, both sexes to avoid crisis pregnancies;
- Where crisis pregnancies occur, both sexes should have an equal role to play in deciding the future of the pregnancy;
- The impact of crisis pregnancies can be felt by males and females and thus counselling and other health care services can be required by both parents.

“Family-friendly policy making for men is not the same as family –friendly policy making for women.”

Adrienne Burgess, 1997:163.

Men are not merely sperm-banks – the majority of fathers in unplanned pregnancies want to be involved in decision-making over the pregnancy and in rearing their children. Margaret Acton (Barnardos, Co-ordinator Teenage Pregnancy Support Services, Dept. of Health Pilot Project) found recently that, in a Dads R Us group, 60% of the fathers were actively involved with their children. Men are not merely providers of an ingredient for human procreation, test-tube fillers; they are, when they are allowed to be, positive role models, loving, caring, necessary parents and partners, just as capable of making a valuable contribution to arriving at a solution to crisis pregnancies as women. Thus men are critical to solution building and identifying ways forward if crisis pregnancies are to be addressed in the manners specified by the CPA.

“The United States is rapidly moving toward the experience of several European countries in which an ‘unmarried birth’ is more likely to occur in a two-parent family than it is to create a mother-only family. ... a fact that has implications for how we should think about ‘families’ on the one hand, and ‘unmarried childbearing’ on the other”.

Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, 2000:6-7

Key Research Findings on Fathers – Lewis & Warren 2001

- Fathers are the main carers for children while mothers are working.
- Most men say they enjoy having close relationships with their children. Indeed fathers from a diversity of social and ethnic backgrounds usually say that fathering is the most important part of their lives.
- A parent's gender is far less important in affecting child development than broader qualities such as warmth and kindness.
- Fathers who have participated in baby-care courses take on more care of their babies than fathers who have not.
- Men feel deeply moved by the experience of childbirth. Nine out of ten fathers attend the delivery of their babies.
- Mothers report that fathers are their main source of emotional support after the birth.
- Men who feel positive about their work are especially able to cope with the demands of a new baby.
- There is no difference between men's and women's patterns of arousal in response to their newborn babies.
- Fathers are as sensitive and responsive to their young children as mothers are.
- How fathers spend time with their young children is more important to the father-child relationship than how often they are with them.
- Fathers and mothers give their babies the same amount of affection.
- Babies usually "bond" as easily with their fathers as with their mothers.
- Some studies suggest that fathers help particularly in preparing the child for the outside world and developing "social skills".
- When fathers are involved with their children before the age of 11, they are more likely to escape having a criminal record by the age of 21.
- Non-resident fathers often have a strong presence in their children's lives. Most studies have shown that the children who fare best after divorce are those who see their fathers most often. However, a good father-child relationship usually reflects a harmonious relationship between the parents.
- Step fathers often become more involved in domestic life than biological fathers.
- In 10 per cent of families affected by divorce the father is the parent with whom the children live for most or all of the time.

There would appear to be four main obstacles excluding lone fathers from family life and the pregnancy experience:

1. Ideological barriers that see families from either a mother's perspective (like the CPA) or a supposedly child's perspective but rarely from a father's or dual-parent's perspective. Much of the prevailing ideology about the family continues to assume that a father's role is actually outside or peripheral to the pregnancy and/or family

"The evidence from our experience seems to suggest that some fathers genuinely wish to be involved with their children, they want their children to know them, to spend time with them and to experience their extended family. However our evidence also suggests that there are major obstacles in the way of some fathers in having a relationship with their children born outside marriage"

Margaret Dromey and Margot Doherty, Treoir: 1992:11

2. Legal barriers that exclude the single father from full decision-making in the pregnancy and from full parenting rights to the child. An unmarried father is not part of a family within the legal meaning of Article 41 of the Constitution, nor is he a parent within the meaning of Article 42 of the Constitution; as a result, he has no personal right to his child which the state is bound to protect under Article 40.3. These highlight the exclusionary, distrustful and negative attitudes that exist towards single fathers. Underlying these assumptions seems to be a distinction between deserving and undeserving fathers, which is resonant of the Victorian Poor Law distinction. A survey in 1999 (cited in McKeown 2001: p. 17) of 1,000 separated applicants for one-parent family payment found that about 20% of the children of unmarried fathers – equivalent to about 3,000 children – may never know or be able to find out who their natural father is. A similar proportion of children of separated parents seem to be in the same situation. It is difficult to find anything in the existing legal provisions for unmarried fathers and their children that could be said to be helpful or supportive of marginalized men in taking up a responsible fathering role during pregnancy and after the birth

“The law still focuses on the relationship between mother and father, rather than the father and the child. We need fundamental reform of this legislation which will give legal recognition to the importance of fatherhood”.

Suzanne Speak, Stuart Cameron and Rose Gilroy, 1997:34.

3. Income support barriers, as a result of the operation of the one-parent family payment, which supplant rather than support fathers

“A young unmarried man might have the same parental instincts and nurturing capabilities as any other father but these may not be allowed to flourish under current policy, structural or cultural constraints”.

Suzanne Speak, Stuart Cameron and Rose Gilroy, 1997:6

4. The absence of family support services for the parenting role of lone fathers.

“Within the last decade someone upped the ante on the tokens required for manhood. A generation ago providing for one’s family was the only economic requirement. Nowadays, supplying the necessities entitles a man only to marginal respect. If your work allows you only to survive you are judged to be not much of a man. To be poor in a consumerist society is to have failed the manhood test”.

Sam Keen, 1991.

Interventions in support of dual-parenting pregnancies and family life need to be less divisive between mothers and fathers. The removal of these barriers would have long-term benefits not only for fathers but for mothers and children as well. So the removal of barriers affecting single fathers must be part of a much more supportive strategy (than CPAs) to assist single-parent households generally. One of the difficulties in preparing a submission like this is that lone fatherhood does not exist in any statistical sense essentially because those who collect such quantitative data do not seem to recognise that families and households are not the same thing. It is recognised that

there can be more than one family in a household but equally – and the reality is that this is increasingly the case – there can be one family in more than one household, as when parents are living apart and the father or mother is not living with the children. Is a father or mother who is not living with his/her children not still a father or mother and part of the psychological reality of that family?

“Fathers and families need new images of what a father can be, images that go beyond the idea of father as outsider, father as provider, or father as intruder in the home. There is a need for images that acknowledge father as a potent nurturant force within the family as well as a creative liaison with the world outside the family”

Arthur Colman and Libby Colman, 1988:1-2.

Strictly speaking, it is a misnomer to speak of one- and two-parent families since every child has two parents, irrespective of whether they are married, separated, single, cohabiting or living apart; in this sense there are no one-parent families – only one- and two-parent households. In the same vein, there are no such things as one-parent pregnancies and thus all aspects of crisis pregnancies should and must be shared equally by both father and mother. Services must encourage and facilitate this and ensure that neither parent is excluded from the experience, the problem and the solution.

“It is overwhelmingly to the social order, as it is concretised in the family, and to the place that social order allows the father to assume, almost independently of his personal qualities, that Freud and Lacan direct our attention. In our contemporary production-oriented world everything has conspired to diminish the place of the Father, and the process has been powerfully assisted by a psychology too preoccupied with the gratification and frustration of need to realise that this perspective overlooks an essential dimension of human reality.”

Cormac Gallagher, 1986:138.

The CPA mentions education and advice as means for reducing crisis pregnancies. Common sense tells us that this education and advice must include both males and females. However, the complete absence of any mention of men/fathers from CPAs material suggests that this common sense has not filtered through to its understanding of the process of pregnancies, crisis or not. The absence of men from family support services and the need to make services more accessible and acceptable to fathers has become an area of growing concern for policy makers and practitioners alike.

The Agency also mentions contraceptive services as a similar mechanism for avoiding crisis pregnancies. The most common form of contraception (and therefore the most popular method for avoiding crisis pregnancies) used in Ireland today is the condom – worn by the male. Yet, once again, you consciously exclude men from your agenda and programme of action.

At a crisis pregnancy consultation day, organised by the North-Eastern Health Board in Carrickmacross, only a tiny percentage of participants were men. We need to question why it is that men attend such events in so few numbers.

- How many women's/mother's groups were invited?
- How many men's/father's groups were invited?
- Why was there such a discrepancy?
- Why were all three main speakers women?
- Why was the event held on a week-day when men are far less likely than women to be able to attend?

The CPAs entirely feminist agenda is blatantly exposed by its definition of crisis pregnancy. It is one '*neither planned nor desired by the woman concerned and which represents a crisis for her*'. Unfortunately, we have to point out to you again that a pregnancy is the product of a physical relationship between a man and a woman.

- Can we assume from this definition that the needs, emotions, plans, desires, hopes and interests of fathers are of no consequence whatsoever?
- Do you believe that mothers have sole, exclusive hegemony over the future of crisis pregnancies?
- Are fathers disposable once they couple with the mother to create the pregnancy?
- Do fathers have no role other than money providers?

This grossly offensive, insulting and hurtful definition will function to further marginalize and isolate men/fathers and will significantly contribute to a widening of the already existing massive divisions and tensions between the sexes. The Agency's cul-de-sac policy-making completely feminises what, common sense tells us, is a human issue for both mothers, fathers and children. In this way, the Crisis Pregnancy Strategy is yet another manifestation of the feminisation and anti-masculinisation of national social and economic policy, in which men's and boy's experiences are excluded or, at best, judged by their subservience to the matriarchal agenda.

AMEN's head office is in Navan, Co. Meath. There is a Lone Parents group in the Springboard Family Centre. At a recent lunch organised by the group, they admitted that they have great difficulties in attracting lone fathers to their activities and yet they have no outreach practices towards single fathers. This exclusion of lone fathers is not only a nationwide phenomena; it is purely symptomatic of the exclusive focus on women's needs.

In CPAs material, at risk criteria for women are listed – low self-esteem, poverty, low educational achievement, children of teenage mothers, history of sexual abuse, mental health problems, history of offending behaviour, children looked after by HSS Trusts. What is conveniently ignored is that:

- men are just as likely to live in poverty as women;
- men suffer from low self-esteem more than women – this is evidenced by the concentration of suicide among men and occurs in the context of the relegation of men in a feminised society;
- men achieve lower educational standards than women;
- male children are more likely to be sexually abused than female children;
- men suffer from mental health problems more than women;
- men offend more than women;
- males are as likely as females to be children of teenage mothers and to be looked after by HSS Trusts.

Thus, these criteria, outlined as at risk indicators for women and crisis pregnancies, apply to men even more so and render them at risk of fathering crisis pregnancies. Yet CPA focuses exclusively and entirely on females.

Many of the men who have approached AMEN for help and support have experienced a number of problems over unplanned/undesirable pregnancies. These include:

- women telling men that they are taking the Pill when, in truth, they are not, resulting in a crisis pregnancy;
- women telling men that they are NOT taking the Pill when, in truth, they are;
- women hiding their pregnancies from their men partners;
- women lying to men that they are the fathers of their unborn child when, in truth, they are not;
- women lying to men that they are NOT the fathers of their unborn child when, in truth, they ARE;
- mothers excluding fathers from rearing children;
- pregnant women having abortions without even informing the fathers;
- women putting children up for adoption without consulting the father.

The consequences of crisis pregnancies are also catalogued – health, education, employment and income. In a crisis pregnancy, the father can also suffer from these consequences. He may experience stress, anxiety, depression, particularly if he is excluded from decisions over the pregnancy and this can affect his education. If he is in education, he may have to forfeit this to look after the mother and the baby. His employment may suffer, he may lose his job or jeopardise his career and these can have an obvious effect on his income. The reality is that most single fathers and single mothers live in relatively disadvantaged circumstances, have low levels of education and poor earning capacity and many are unable to meet the cost of independently supporting a family.

Without the intervention of the state, family life in these disadvantaged circumstances would be virtually impossible. However, the particular way in which the state

intervenes to help lone mothers and fathers – and the ideology which support this intervention – adds to the social exclusion of lone fathers and, in the long term, further weakens the fabric of those families and communities. As a result, many lone fathers not only face exclusion from the labour market and an important source of identity and fulfilment through work, but they also face the even deeper form of social exclusion from family life and an irreplaceable stakeholding in society through parenting their children, either as breadwinners or homemakers or both. Many children also suffer from not having a father living with them or even in regular contact with them.

Radical gender feminist ideology has contributed enormously to the devaluation of fatherhood and of manhood in general. Any diminution of fatherhood is a diminution of motherhood and a diminution of parenthood. Misguided social policies of the last many decades have been reckless with children's lives. Misguided policies have created fatherlessness. Misguided policies in social welfare law, in family law, in divorce law, in child welfare law, in abortion law have resulted in national problems, in our crises of father alienation and fatherlessness. Fathers/men face courts, laws, and systems that will not hear their voices. Men/fathers demand and are entitled to a place at the crisis pregnancy table.

All neutral social science commentaries tell us that fatherlessness is a major social problem as do public opinion surveys. A 1996 Gallop Poll on fathering entitled "Fathers in America" commissioned by the National Center for Fathering based in Kansas, reveals that 79.1% of Americans agree that the most significant social problem facing America is fatherlessness and paternal absence. In a 1990 article entitled *A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s* published by the Progressive Policy Institute, social scientists Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William A. Galston addressed the enormous social consequences of fatherlessness. They said:

"The economic consequences of a parent's absence (almost always the father's) are often accompanied by psychological consequences, which include higher than average levels of youth suicide, low intellectual and educational performance, and higher than average rates of mental illness, violence and drug abuse. Equally suggestive is the anecdotal evidence of the difficulties many young single mothers experience in raising their sons. The absence of fathers as models and co-disciplinarians is thought to contribute to the low self-esteem, anger, violence, and peer-bonding through gang membership of many fatherless boys. Nowhere is this more evident than in the long-standing and strong relationship between crime and one-parent families."

CPA does mention young men and advocates 'involving boys and young men' and 'tailoring services'. What do these statements mean? The entire thrust of the strategy focuses completely on females. Fathers are presented in the roles of mere cash-dispensers, incapable of caring parenthood and unwilling to fulfil their responsibilities. It is perhaps little wonder that so many single fathers do not fulfil their responsibilities when they are afforded little or no rights. Surely the core thrust of CPAs strategy should be equality, parity of esteem in rights and responsibilities for fathers and mothers – and therefore in the best interests of the children. Central to CPAs spirit is the woman's right to choose – whether to become pregnant or not,

whether to abort or not, whether to rear the child or not? Nowhere does CPA address or promote the man's right to choose in any area of pregnancy or child-rearing.

Presumably, CPA would advocate the 'Exploring Masculinities' educational programme as a way of 'involving' young males. However, this feminist-inspired document emphasises a minimalist or non-existent role young men and boys in all decisions over pregnancies, planned or unplanned. 'Welcoming young men' to health care services is also mentioned – but the definition of crisis pregnancy specifically and consciously excludes young men from any consideration. What might the health consequences be for the father in a crisis pregnancy who is excluded by the mother from the experience and whose interests lie solely in supporting and caring for the mother and the baby?

“Child-rearing needs to be acknowledged as a satisfying experience which can lead to personal growth (and which fathers are too often denied), rather than as a burden (which they are lucky to escape)”

Adrienne Burgess and Sandy Ruxton, 1996:ix.

Dr Kieran McKeown (2001, *Families & Single Fathers in Ireland*, Administration, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 3/24) points to the systematic deterioration in the lot of single fathers and concludes that '*single fathers are an extremely excluded and ostracised group in Ireland today*'. He argues that they are among the least visible and the most voiceless and that they are often seen as dangerous, useless, distrustful, self-destructive and irresponsible. The isolation of single fathers from CPAs strategy reinforces these myths. Of course, it is true that single mothers are often (but far from always) left with the baby; but single fathers can suffer from an even worse fate; to be left without any contribution to the pregnancy, to be left without their baby and to be excluded from the intimacy of the pregnancy, family life and the parenting of the child. Many lone fathers are virtually an outcast group in Irish society. Sigmund Freud said that if you can work and love, you can live a normal life; the conditioning and life experiences of many lone fathers suggest that they do not meet Freud's standard for living a normal life. How does CPA intend to address these problems?

The Crisis Pregnancy strategy aims to provide:

- a reduction in the number of crisis pregnancies by the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services. *These services must be provided for males and females;*
- a reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive. *It must be accepted that women alone do not have crisis pregnancies; mothers and fathers have pregnancies and thus the latter must be fully and equally involved in discussions of and decision made about the various options available and these services and supports must be provided for fathers as well as mothers;*
- counselling and medical services after crisis pregnancies. *Given the ideological, legal, social and other forms of isolation of fathers, these services must be provided for them as well as mothers.*

A key theme which informs this submission is that no one should be left out of the family picture. An inclusive society requires an inclusive family. Mothers, fathers and children, including the extended family, are all part of the family picture which, for all the vicissitudes of family life, is part of the reality to which everyone belongs; family histories are dotted by the abiding presences of absent members. At various times in history, ways of thinking about the family have tended to displace, distort or simply ignore the lived experiences of different family members, be they mothers, children or fathers and, inevitably, new ways of thinking about families have always emerged to redirect attention towards these blind spots. This submission and the work of AMEN is part of a process of keeping fathers in the family picture alongside mothers and children and, as such, is based on the belief that an inclusive family helps to create an inclusive society.

Mary T. Cleary
National Co-ordinator Amen
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