UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Adult Never-married Single Mothers in Taiwan:
the decision to become a mother and its effects on their social network

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Raising the issues

A. Images of Never-married single mothers (NMSMs) in Taiwan

In Public/media
- The privilege of high-income mothers
- Women who were dumped or who were a mistress
- Teenage mothers without the knowledge of contraception
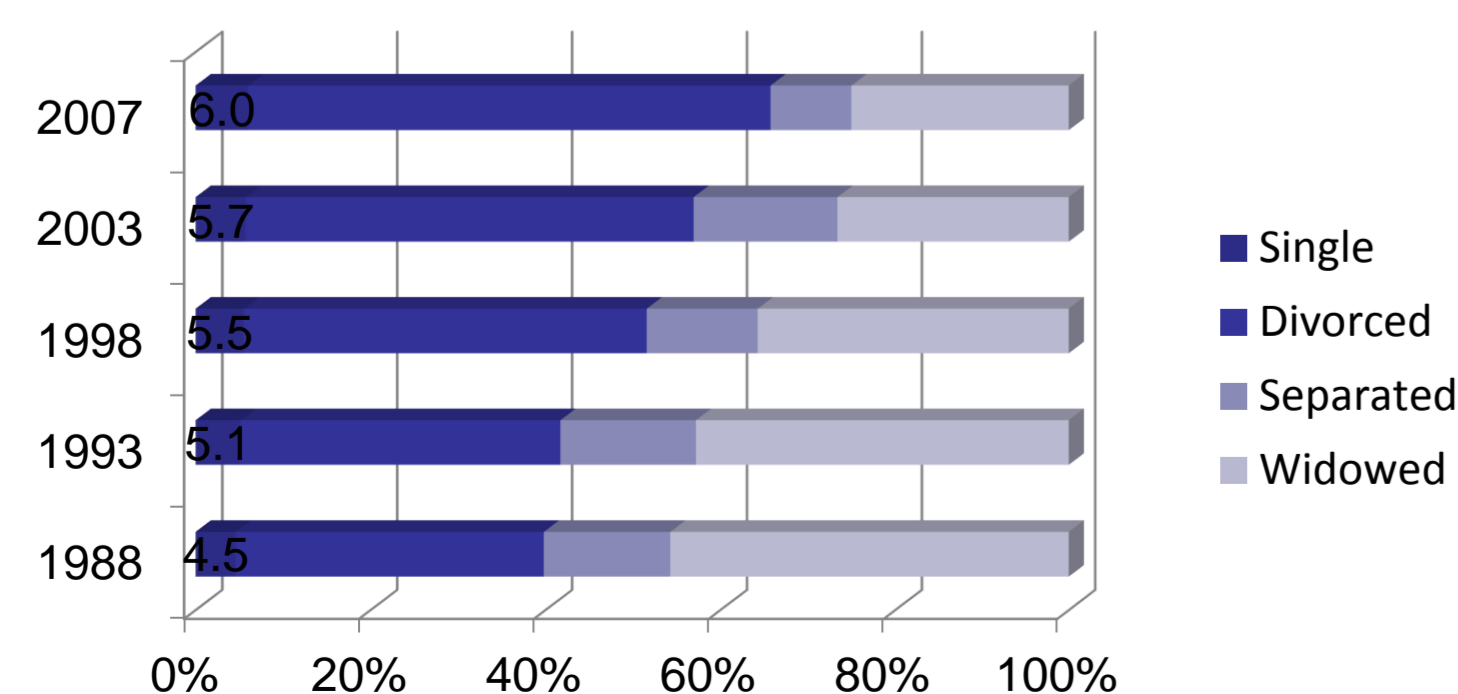
In Policy
- 'Being a single parent is a personal failure' (Sheu, 2000)
- Was not considered eligible for the Child Procreation Allowance

B. Lack of social support due to 'the transgression'

C. The proportion has been rising but still small

Only Six percent of all single mothers* in Taiwan (Figure 1) .

Figure 1 Proportion of single mothers according to status

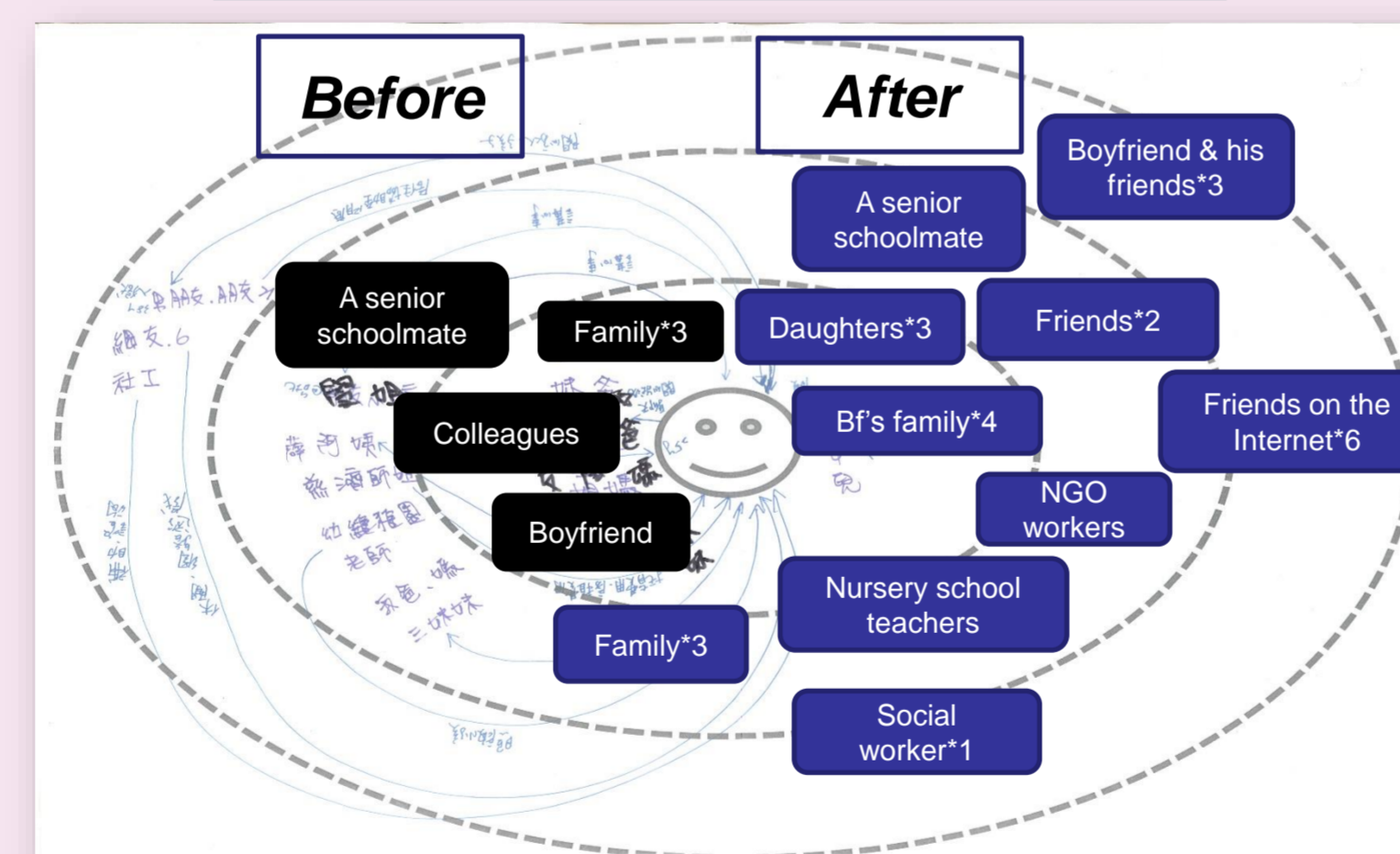|	Single	Divorced	Separated	Widowed
2007	6.0			
2003	5.7			
1998	5.5			
1993	5.1			
1988	4.5			

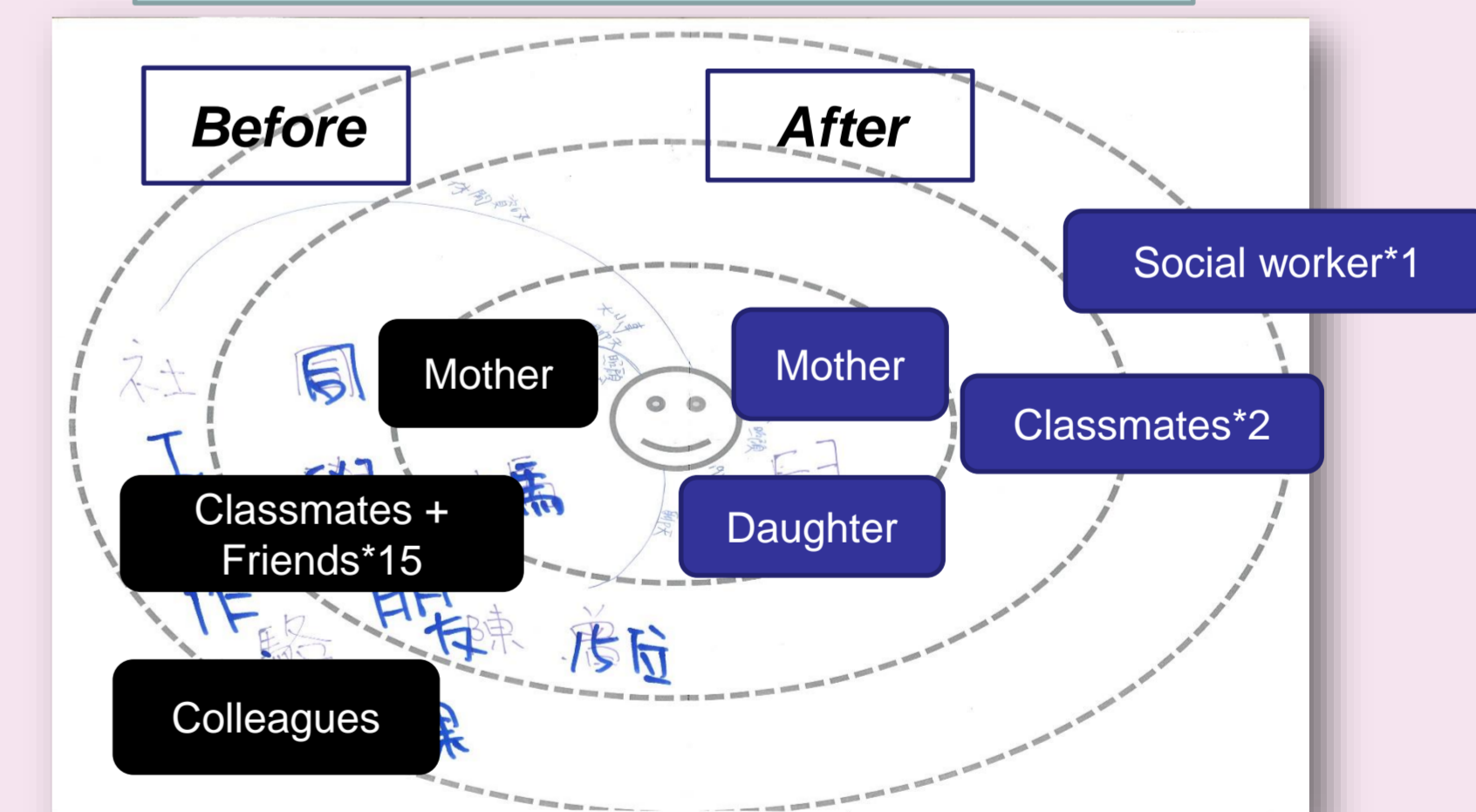Source: Cheng, C., Wang, S. and Hsieh, M. (2008)

Findings so far

1. The reasons why they were unwilling to become NMSMs came from their unsuitable ex-partners or the involvement of both sides of their families. However, they decided to keep the child with them because of the considerations of their own.
3. The decision to become NMSMs also affected the structure and the size of their social network.
(1) The characteristics of the network might change as the nature of the event presented as a transgression and an emergency in the Taiwanese context. Their family, close friends or colleagues might have to decide whether to withdraw their help or offer more support to them. Moreover, the benefit system also join to buffer the financial effects and a few of the mothers depended on it to some extent in order to manage their lives.
(2) Most of them expanded their networks for more support, either from welfare system or friends with similar experiences on the Internet (See case of Hui-chiao). However, some of the NMSMs cut several of their previous networks due to the shame they had borne with since they become NMSMs (See case of Hsuan-hsuan).

Case of expansion - *Hui-chiao*

Case of shrinkage - *Hsuan-hsuan*

Methods

- 30 adult NMSMs (over 18) with children under 6 as participants.
- Episodic narrative interviews (Flick, 2002) was conducted from a Constructivist stance.
- *Ecomapping* (Ray & Street, 2005), with the technique of *Sociograms* (Hogan, Carrasco, & Wellman, 2007) was used to visualize the change of NMSMs' networks and support.
- Framework approach (Spencer, Ritchie, O'Connor, Morrell, & Ormston, 2013) as the analytical tool.

Conclusions

- NMSMs were initially unwilling to become a NMSM as they expected their relationships could turn into a proper marriage. However, due to a strong desire to be a mother, they decided to become a single mother to raise their children on their own.

- NMSM's social networks are affected by the decision of becoming a NMSM. The structure and the size of their network both changed after they gave birth to their children. However, instead of losing networks due to the stigma of becoming a NMSM as the researcher assumed, the pattern of the change varies among them. Surprisingly, some of them expanded their network and discovered new resources for managing their lives. These resources may include their family, their social workers or their friends who had similar experiences from the Internet. Further explorations are thus needed to look at how they utilized these resources in depth.