

information sheet

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FORUM III-SUPPORT

WORKGROUPS 29-30 - THE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE MOTHER OUTSIDE THE HOME

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I. The Number of Working Mothers

In the 10 years 1948-58 the proportion of mothers in the labor force increased by almost 50%.

In the Spring 1958, of 22 million women in the labor force part or full time, 16.6 million were or had been married; of these, 7.5 million had children under 18.

II. Marital Status of Working Mothers

Wives with husbands present are much more numerous in our population than women widowed, divorced or separated from their husbands. Even though a larger proportion of the latter work, a larger number of mothers with husband present (6.1 million) than mothers in broken homes (1.4 million) are in the labor force.

The chief increase in labor force participation among mothers in the last 10 years has been among those living with their husbands. Little increase occurred among mothers widowed, divorced, or separated--for whom the rate was already high. However, the rate is still twice as high for mothers in broken homes as for those with husband present.

III. Income in Families of Working Mothers

In 1957, women who worked full time the year round averaged not quite two-thirds of the average income of men who worked full time. This differential adds to the problems of women in broken homes.

The average income of all families with a female head was little more than half that of those with a male head. Almost two-fifths of such families had incomes under \$2,000.

While the employment of women seems to be most closely related to absence of young children in the household, the size of the husband's income, if he is part of the household, is an additional factor. Among wives 20-44 years old with no children under 18, there is only a slight relation between labor force participation rates and husband's income. But for mothers with children at home, the rates drop steeply as the husband's income rises beyond \$3,000:

IV. General Characteristics of Working Mothers

Husband present in family	27%
Widowed, divorced, or separated	57%
Children under 6	20%
Children over 6	41%
Husband's income \$10,000 or more	7% (child under 6) 14% (child over 6)
Husband's income under \$3,000	37%
White, with children under 6	15%
Nonwhite, with children over 6	28%

Below-average income is a particular handicap to nonwhite mothers. The median annual income of all female workers in 1957 was \$757 for nonwhites compared to \$1,310 for whites.

V. How Much Do They Work?

Of the mothers who work, the majority work at full-time jobs in any one week, but many do not work all year round. Proportions vary sharply with the age of the children, mothers of very young children being far more likely to work part time or not all the year round.

For women living with their husbands, the extent of full or part-time work is also related to the husband's income, part-time work being more frequent in the very high or very low income brackets. During 1956, more than a third of all working wives whose husbands' incomes were \$3,000-\$7,000 worked at full-time jobs for 50 weeks or more, as compared with just over one-fourth when the husband's income was under \$2,000 or over \$10,000.

VI. Child Care While Mother Works

A survey made by the Bureau of the Census for the Children's Bureau in the Spring of 1958 inquired into the child-care arrangements of a large sample of mothers who worked full time and had children under 12. These women (2.9 million) represented about 1 in 7 mothers in the nation and about 53% of the working mothers with children under 12.

These mothers had 5.1 million children under 12 years, 1.2 million 3-5 years, and 800,000 under 3 years of age.

Of the children under 12, 82% lived with both parents; the remaining 18% lived in homes broken by death, divorce, or the absence of one parent.

On the average, families with working mothers had the same number of children under 18 (2.3) as all families with children:

1/3 had one child
1/3 had two children
1/5 had three children
1/7 had four or more children

Most children under 12 were cared for at home, approximately in this manner:

16% by fathers
30% by other relatives
12% by nonrelatives

Of the children cared for away from home:

10% were cared for by relatives
6% by neighbors
3% by other non-relatives
2% received group care in day nurseries, day-care centers, settlement houses, nursery schools and similar establishments
8% had no special care and looked out for themselves
13% had unknown arrangements

More than one-third of the children left in their own homes with relatives were in the care of persons under 18. Most of those left away from home with relatives were in the care of adults.

VII. Why Mothers Work

The chief incentive to work appears to be economic pressure--whether the felt need is for bread and a roof, for educating the children, or for a better car. That economic pressure is not, however, the only incentive is underlined by a Detroit study which reports that a majority of both sexes in a sample of employed men and women said they would work even if it were not economically necessary.

VIII. Effects of Maternal Employment on Children and Family Life

Consensus of current research is that gainful employment of the wife does not determine marriage success or failure, but is often an excuse for conflict due to other causes.

As for the children, there is so far no solid evidence that maternal employment in itself contributes to juvenile delinquency. A number of studies show differences in psychological adjustment between children whose mothers do and do not work--differences sometimes favoring the children of nonworking mothers and sometimes those of working mothers. Analysis sometimes reveals, however, that differences in child behavior and adjustment arise from other factors related to the mother's working rather than from the fact of her employment itself.

On the basis of clinical evidence, some observers believe that maternal employment per se has in many cases a damaging effect on children, particularly those under 10 years of age.

Clinical and other evidence supports the conclusion that "it is not so much the physical proximity of the mother to the child, or the constancy of the attention she provides that matters profoundly, but the quality of the care that the child receives from the mother, or from both parents, or from a substitute parent."1/

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1. Henry David, "Work, Women and Children," The Nation's Children, 1960 White House Conference.