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WORKSETTING OF NIGERIAN WOMEN AND CHILD ABUSE: ANALYSIS OF UNDERLYING FACTORS

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Abstract: *This paper highlights work setting of Nigerian women and child abuse: analysis of underlying factors. It is premised on the fact that women's work setting makes pressing demands on their time and energy that would have otherwise been channeled to their homes and children. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire, using 450 working mothers in the public and private sectors of Rivers State Nigeria. Areas considered include level of involvement of working mothers in childcare needs, their involvement in cooking for the family and the number of hours spent at work. Findings revealed that working mother's long absence from home gives them no room to monitor their children's behavior and detect early enough character traits, which are potential tendencies to child abuse. It is therefore recommended that government should assist mothers by introducing family friendly polices like flex time which allows them rearrange hours spent at work to encompass the demands of children as well as work.*

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Introduction

Children are like tender flowers in a bud, full of potentials and capabilities, which require a healthy and stimulating environment to mature. Parents, play a major role especially the mothers in ensuring that children are well equipped. They are the future leaders and guarantors of tomorrow therefore no investment made on them is ever too great. Children need care, love and direction and nobody is best suited to do that, except the parents, especially the mothers (Medinnus and Johnson, 1976). With the recent growing occupational involvement of women in Nigeria, most of them are struggling not to negate their primary role as wives and mothers. A combination of the two roles (home responsibilities and work schedules) implies that effectiveness in some aspects of the two or one of them may suffer (Coser and Rokoff, 1980). In order for working women to meet up with organizational goals, a lot of demands and pressure are put on their time, thereby reducing the time and energy required to give attention to the home. This affects most children as the daily physical and long absence of working mothers in the home has subjected them to different kinds of stress and strains that are detrimental to their psychological growth and development and this is child abuse. A situation in which issues pertaining to children's welfare and survival are neglected by parents either consciously or unconsciously. In most extreme cases, these children are exposed to health hazards and different forms of hardship, which include child labour, poor education, sexual abuse, poor living conditions, which can jeopardize their very existence. (Ogunlade, 1995). It is against this background that this pa-

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per is set to empirically determine the underlying factors in the work setting of Nigerian women as it affects child abuse. This includes their level of involvement in child care, their involvement in cooking for their families and the numbers of hours spent at work.

Theoretical Background

Women have always had a major barrier affecting their occupational involvement if not excluding them from it, and this is the issue of having children. There is an age long cultural mandate, which prescribes women's primary responsibility as homemakers and not wage earners (Coser and Rokoff, 1980). As long as this premise is established, working mothers who wish to keep jobs are said to experience role conflict, which is a source of social disruption, in both the occupational and familial systems. Schneider (1988), describe role-conflict as an inevitable problem that occurs, when a person discovers that two roles he or she is playing make conflicting demands. Rossel (1980) rightly observed that a number of working mothers chose not to give up their jobs for family life, while others would like to have both family and job. Efforts to articulate these two roles have become problematic especially as the family makes demands on them that claims their energy and time, which should have been channelled to their jobs. On the other hand, the work places equally make pressing demands on working mothers, which has been in the home front. When women are faced with the work pressure of the two role-sets, there is a tendency for some women to relax or reduce attention given to the home, since the work place attracts some financial reward.

Mother's role in the home cannot be over emphasized, it includes providing emotional dependency, shaping behavioural and attitudinal characteristics and providing direction for the children. Maternal employment without proper supervision in the home can create an atmosphere for child abuse, which may inadvertedly lead to child delinquency (Unger, 1979). The government in recent times has shown great concern over abused children and in order to combat this ugly situation has put in place a National Emergency Relief Agency to offer relief to such children (Abati, 1995). Bearing in mind the dual role-working mothers are involved in, they need assistance by the government to make their presence more felt in the home.

The Setting [473]

This study was carried out in Rivers-state of Nigeria. It is situated in the south-south geopolitical zone of the country. The service sector of the state is highly developed with an increased number of working mothers engaged in its public and private sectors.

Methods

A total number of 450 working mothers in the public and private sectors were selected through the stratified random technique and used for this study. A survey questionnaire was used for the collection of data. It elicited responses from working mothers on how they cope with various situations at home. It specifically elicited information on who takes care of children when at work, who does the routine school run, looks after the child when he/she is sick and who takes the child to parties and outing. Other information includes their pattern of cooking for the family and the number of hours they spend at work. Data was collected and analysed using the independent t-test.

Results and Discussion

The table below highlights the level of involvement of working mothers to childcare needs.

TABLE 1. Involvement of Working Mothers to Childcare Needs

Variable	Level of Involvement	Public		Private		Total	
		N=148		N=174		N=322	
Care for	Neighbour (1)	3	2.0	6	3.4	9	2.8
Children	Spouse (2)	5	3.4	10	5.7	15	4.7
While at	House help/ relations (3)	90	60.8	108	62.0	198	61.5
Work	Nursery/ Day care (4)	50	33.8	50	28.7	100	31.1
		N=144		N=186		N=330	
Routine	Self (1)	34	23.6	45	24.2	79	23.9
School run	Self & Spouse (2)	50	34.7	63	33.9	113	34.2
	Spouse (3)	21	14.6	23	12.4	44	13.3
	My driver/ relations/ house help (4)	39	27.1	55	29.6	94	28.5
		N=154		N=184		N=338	
Care for	Self (1)	48	31.2	65	35.3	113	33.4
A sick Child	Self & Spouse (2)	83	53.9	91	49.5	174	51.5
	Spouse (3)	9	5.8	8	4.3	17	5.0
	House help/ relations (4)	14	9.1	20	10.9	34	10.1
		N=144		N=173		N=317	
Taking	Self (1)	49	34.0	61	35.3	110	34.7
Children to	Self & Spouse (2)	61	42.4	82	47.4	143	45.1
Parties and	Spouse (3)	12	8.3	8	4.6	20	6.3
Outings	House help/ relation (4)	22	15.3	22	12.7	44	13.9

Authors Field Survey 2003

Table 1 reveals that a high percentage of working mothers are not involved in the care of their children while at work. Most women entrust the care of their children to house helps/ relations (61.5%) and nursery/ day care centres (31.1%) respectively. [474]

As regards routine school run 48.1% are not involved in school run, they make use of their driver, relations, house helps and their spouses in the care for sick children and in taking them to parties and outings. Most working mothers seem to be involved. This is evidenced by 33.4% and 51.5% respectively in the care for a sick child, which involves self and self/spouse. In taking children to parties 34.7% and 45.1% involve self and self /spouse.

TABLE 2. Involvement of Working Mothers in Cooking

Variable	Level of Involvement	Public %		Private %		Total %	
		N=191		N=218		N=409	
Cooking for	Self (1)	75	18.3	101	24.7	176	43.0
the Family	Self & Spouse (2)	21	5.1	46	11.2	67	16.4
	House help/ hired persons/ relations (3)	-	-	2	.5	2	.5
	House help/ hired persons/ relations (4)	95	23.2	69	16.9	164	40.1

Authors Field Survey 2003

Table 2 shows that 43% of working mothers handle cooking by themselves 16.4% cook with their spouses .5% handle cooking with their house helps, hired persons and relations, while a significant percentage of 40 leave it for their house helps, hired persons and relations to handle.

TABLE 3. Hours spent at Work

Variable	Groupings	Public %		Private %		Total%	
		N=207		N=236		N=443	
Hours of	6 hours	37	8.4	14	3.2	51	11.5
Work	8 hours	73	16.5	116	26.2	189	42.7
	9 hours	76	17.2	74	16.7	150	33.9
	Above 9 hours	21	4.7	32	7.2	53	12.0

Authors Field Survey 2003

Table 3 shows that a total number of 42.7% and 33.9% of working mothers both in public and private sectors spend between 8 and 9 hours at work. While 12% spend more than 9 hours

Discussion

Working mothers leaving the care of their children to house helps/ relatives e.t.c is not in the best interest of the child. House helps in Nigeria in particular are considered as "necessary evils" and many working mothers have experienced untold hardships in their hands. Many children have been neglected, under fed and battered by these helps.

The physical absence of mothers from the home, depicted by the long working hours (8 – 9), [475] coupled with the heavy traffic congestion on the way back home makes most women reach home late at night, when the children are already in bed. Some mothers hardly have much contact with their children during the week. There is therefore no way of monitoring their behaviour and detecting early enough character traits. These are potential tendencies to child abuse.

Many working mothers also rely on house helps/ hired persons/ relations to handle cooking for the family. This also implies that many mothers may not have control over the quality and hygiene of the food prepared for the family. Neither can they guarantee proper feeding of the children by these helps. Children subjected to poor quality nutrition and hygiene is a form of child abuse.

Conclusion

Recognizing the impact of maternal deprivation on growing children and their subsequent impact on the society, the government should assist working mothers to give more attention to their children by introducing some family friendly policies like establishing schools and day care centres in workplaces and introducing flex time as done in the United State, where working mothers are allowed to re-adjust their work by rearranging hours spent at work to encompass the demands of children as well as work.

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