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Working Women And Care of The Young Child In Western Nigeria

*E.B. Wilson**

INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in the labour force is hardly a new phenomena in Africa. In Western Nigeria¹ among the Yoruba the importance of a woman having her own economic base has been long recognized.² A women's earning power may provide feelings of economic independence and individual self worth but, more importantly, it may be directly related to the material quality of life of her children. Many women, particularly those in polygamous homes use large portions of their income to provide clothing, books, food and medicine for their children.

What is new and also problematic is the shift from more traditional forms of employment, e.g. farming, petty trading or crafts where it has been assumed that children could safely and easily accompany their mothers, to modern sector labour activities, where the presence of the child has been deemed unacceptable because it interferes with production, or is hazardous to the child's physical safety and detrimental to its socio-emotional and intellectual development. Interest in child care, particularly care provided outside the home is a recent phenomenon generated by the desire to release women from the burdens of child rearing so that they might effectively participate in modern sectors of the economy. Emphasis is placed on the importance of child care provision in the reduction of psychological stress experienced by the mother and in the enhancement of employee productivity. Unfortunately, the developmental needs of the child have remained a secondary consideration in such discussions.

The argument suggests that mothers experience considerable role conflict and stress managing the roles of production, reproduction and child rearing. This stress is exacerbated when working women feel their children may not be properly cared for in their absence. Such high levels of stress, besides being health hazards for the individual woman, may negatively affect family interaction and contribute to child neglect, mental health or marital problems in the family. Secondly, mothers with child care problems are likely to be mentally distracted and physically absent from work thus reducing their effectiveness as producers.

This paper is concerned with child care in Western Nigeria, particularly as it is experienced by mothers in the modern employment sector. Furthermore, it will examine the relationship between current child care provision, the developmental needs of the child, and the need for adequate policy and practice in the area of child care service delivery. The author's decision to focus on women in modern sector employment does not imply acceptance of the

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TABLE 1

NAME	YEAR BEGAN	CURRENT MEMBERSHIP	LEADERSHIP	FUNCTION	ACTIVITIES: GENERAL	ACTIVITIES: FUNDRAISING	DUES	RECRUITMENT
National Association of University Women	1972	20	Executive: 3	Professional benevolent, social	Education & assistance to disabled; no activities this year.	Rummage sale; bake sale; film shows, guest artists.	?	Anyone holding BA or BS degree
Unife Women's Group	1972	30	Executive: 4	social/benevolent	Aid to disabled, needy, student scholarships; day-care centre; trips; picnics; potlucks; interest groups; cooking, sewing, crafts, books. Monthly meetings.	Bake sale; bazaars; dances; launching.	₦ 5/year	Open
Harmony 77	1977	16	Executive: 3	social/mutual aid	Assist members in various celebrations - financial and moral support; aid to disabled. Monthly meetings.	Initial dance.	₦ 25/year	Recommendation of member; 1/3 approval total members, restrictive.
Women's Christian Fellowship	1980	63	Executive: 5 Standing Committees: 4 Constitution/Bylaws/Creed/Pledge	religious/social/mutual aid	Prayer meetings, anniversary week, religious holidays, counselling, evangelical outreach, chapel needs, library, newsletter. Monthly general meeting and committee meetings.	Bazaar, bake sale; sale of Christmas cards.	₦ 10/year staff; ₦ 5 student.	Member of All Soul's Chapel; student and staff.
The Ritz Club	1980	50	Executive: 8 Membership Committee Constitution	benevolent/social	Group launching, Riz Day, film, initiation, fund for aged, patrons' night. Weekly meetings.	Dues from members, donations from patrons.	₦ 20 initial; ₦ 50/year.	By application; committee interview; restrictive.
Law Students Association/Law Week Committee	?	13	Chair & 12 member committee	educational/social	Represent law students; sponsor Law Week activities; Moot Court Trial, lectures, dinner.	Donations from patrons; student dues; dinners.	₦ 7/year.	Law student.

₦ = \$1.50
? = No Data

assumptions that women in the traditional sector are not currently experiencing problems of child care as has often been suggested,³ or that traditional child care arrangements offer the best avenue for full social and intellectual development of the young child; rather it is a reflection of the fact that current research in the area of problems of child care in Nigeria have been biased in favour of workers in the modern sector and have directed limited attention to the problems of peasant women and women in other more traditional jobs. Full investigations of contemporary child care among these women is a task which remains.

FEMALE EMPLOYMENT AND CHILD CARE

Although employment in the modern sector is not monolithic, it is usually characterised by fixed work days, rigid working hours, productivity demands which are impeded by the presence of children and, in many cases, considerable travel time between home and work. As greater numbers of females enter this sector the problem of child care, particularly for children under six, becomes a critical issue.

Statistics on female labour activity in Western Nigeria can be culled from several sources which would appear more reliable than the dated and contested 1963 census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Adepoju⁴ in a study of female employment patterns in south west Nigeria, reports that the female rate of employment in Ile-Ife (a medium sized university town) was 71.6 percent, and that in Ibadan (a major city and state capital), was 67.7 percent. Approximately 57 percent of the women in Ife were employed in the modern sector while the rate for Ibadan was 50.3 percent. These findings receive support from Adewuyi⁵ who, using data from household surveys conducted in Lagos in 1974, reports female employment rate of 74.5 of which approximately 80 percent are in employee status.

Adewuyi indicates that the employment rate for women whose youngest child is under six and who have no household help is 51.3 percent. He further notes that the lower the paternal income the greater likelihood that the women will work regardless of the absence of household help or the age of the child. Many of these women are employed in low level modern sector jobs as cleaners, attendants, cooks construction or factory labourers.

The working mother who has children under six and no household assistance is forced to look for out of home care. Data extracted from a seven state (Anambra, Bendel, Kano, Lagos, Oyo, Plateau, Rivers) survey of 790 working mothers with children under six years of age suggests that 52 percent of children under two are in institutional care comprised of nursery schools, day care centres, and preparatory schools. Forty-eight per cent are cared for by hired help in the home. The percentages of children from 2-4 and 4-6 in institutional care are 63 percent and 69 percent respectively.

In addition to the high percentage of children currently reported to be in institutional care there is every evidence that the demand for out-of-home child care will continue to increase. Traditionally, women in employee status have solved their child care problems through assistance provided by a member of the

extended family, usually the child's maternal or paternal grandparent who resided in the home, or employment of a housemaid/baby nurse. Traditionally, these have been young non-school going girls, or an older woman whose children are attending school thus freeing her for employment. Within the past decade the availability of the above sources of child care have diminished considerably. Extended family residential patterns are on the decrease and grandparents are reluctant to leave communities where they have established a social identity to reside in isolated, often unfamiliar urban areas. Such arrangements, when they do exist, are more temporary than they have been in the past. Orebanjo⁶ notes that women whose children are cared for by a member of the extended family are more likely to be satisfied with the child care arrangement; however, almost all report that such arrangements are temporary and do not constitute a final resolution of the child care problem.

The situation with relation to hired household assistance is affected by perceptions regarding the quality of personnel which is available and by concrete scarcity. The increasing opportunities for young girls provided by Universal Primary Education coupled with the stringent immigration measures against other West African nationals have resulted in a scarcity of household help and a consequent increase in the cost. In addition, many working women perceive a decline in the quality of help available. Several researchers have indicated that even when women are successful in procuring household assistance they may still experience anxiety regarding the quality and reliability of care their children receive. Thus, Olusanya⁷ reported 41 percent of a selected sample of working women in Lagos felt household help was unstable and unreliable. In addition, 15 percent feared the ill treatment of their children, and 12 percent reported a general sense of 'dissatisfaction'. Olusanya also suggests that the turnover rate for household help is quite high. Extrapolations from his findings suggest that in 50 percent of households, personnel remains for 1 year or less. Such a high rate of change may have a detrimental effect on the emotional and social development of the very young child.

Further support for anticipated growth in demand for out of home care comes from the work of Di Domenico and Asuni⁸. Four hundred and sixty eight (468) working mothers in Ibadan indicated that their major child care problems were good supervision of children and the expense of good care. Many mothers indicated that they felt day care centres would be safer than leaving the child alone with househelp. Preference patterns suggest that 42 percent prefer child care centres, 30 percent prefer relatives and 19 percent prefer maids. In addition 82 percent of the sample indicated they would use daycare centers if places were available and prices reasonable. In a similar study of working mothers in Lagos, Fapohunda⁹ reports that while in 1975 only 6.5 percent of working mothers would consider sending their very young children to day care centres, by 1979 the percentage had increased significantly.

A situation exists, therefore, where the demand for out of home child care is significant and can be safely predicted to increase, particularly if female participation in the modern sector of the labour force continues to expand.

ASPECTS OF CURRENT CHILD CARE PROVISION

Before a thorough discussion of current child care provision is presented, a taxonomy of child care terms is required. Both Blevins and Morrison have noted the dearth of precise and clear terminology in the field of early childhood education in the United States and Europe.¹⁰ This situation is further compounded in Nigeria where early childhood education and commercialised out-of-home child care are relatively new concepts. The terms and definitions presented below reflect common understanding as they are currently employed in Nigeria.

Home Care: the child is cared for in its own home by a relative, housemaid or nanny while the parents are at work.

Day Care: any out of home care provided for children of working parents, such care is often custodial although varying attention may be paid to the social and educational needs of the child. At present in Nigeria there is no clear distinction in policy or parlance between a variety of so called 'day care' arrangements. In this work I suggest the following distinctions:

1. Family Day care which is operated in the care giver's home and often involves less than ten children. The care giver may have a young adolescent girl who assists her, or she may care for the children alone.
2. Day Care Centres - specially designed facilities which are used for child care purposes only. Such facilities have large enrolments and staff. They may be established not only by individual proprietors but also by voluntary agencies, industry, trade unions, local government authorities, or religious bodies.
3. *Home Day Care Centres* - a third very common day care arrangement Nigeria involves the modification of a section of the proprietor's home for child care purposes. Such a facility might be a renovated garage or servant's quarters. Populations in such centres often range from 20—40 children depending on the size of the facility. Additional staff are hired to assist the proprietor.

Day care regardless of the above variation is addressed to children from the age of six weeks to six years although some establishments may refuse to enrol infants under 2 years. Those centres who accept pre-schoolers (ages 3, 4, 5) usually have some type of primary school 'preparatory' section where reading, writing and numeracy skills are stressed. In spite of this fact, it is not uncommon to hear early childhood educators, as well as members of the Nigerian public speak of day care as a facility which deals with children below age 3 and pre-school as the child care institution which deals with older children. In actual practice, the day care may serve both age groups. The operating hours for this type of child care are highly varied, some corresponding with primary school hours 7:30 a.m. — 1:30 p.m. and others corresponding with working hours 7:30—6 p.m.

Play Groups: Arrangements for this activity are varied but usually involve a small group (less than ten) of toddler and pre-school children who come together to play for two or three hours each day, in the home of one of the parents. The site of the play group often rotates among the members.

Nursery Schools: institutions set up for the education of the pre-school aged child. Such institutions are established in school facilities and are subject to jurisdiction under the state education code, which directs that at the very least the head teacher be a trained certificated pre-primary teacher. Nursery schools operate a slightly shortened version of the primary school day. Fees at nursery schools are considerably higher than those in day care centres, possibly due to increased cost of facilities and trained staff.

Documentation of the quality of child care received whether the child is cared for in the home by a domestic help, nanny or member of the extended family is a complex problem, and the author is unaware of any studies which have addressed this issue in Nigeria. Research cited earlier does indicate that many mothers are apprehensive regarding the quality of care a child receives when he left in the home, particularly with house help. Obviously, as is also the case with out-of-home care there is considerable variation in the quality of care delivered. One hypothesis open to verification is that the quality of care the child receives is a function of:

1. the level of job satisfaction of the care giver;
2. the other demands of the job assignment in addition to simply caring for the child;
3. the awareness of the child's physical and emotional development needs;
4. the sanitation level of the care giver and the general environment;
5. safety of the environment; and
6. the activities in which the care giver and child engage.

Although the data is relatively limited some attempts have been made to document the quality of care available in child care centres in Western Nigeria.¹¹ These studies are of two types; subjective where attitudes of the mothers toward the quality of care are reported or where proprietors are asked to describe their centres; and objective, based on observations of the centres themselves. In some cases, a combination of both methods is employed. The observational approach often meets considerable resistance from proprietors who are unwilling to allow researchers access to the facility.

Regardless of the research methodology employed these studies have emphasized three aspects of day care provision: health and safety, curriculum and educational environment, and personnel. Although variations in the quality of out of home child care were noted most studies highlight problems, particularly with relation to the health and safety of the child. Several authors note overcrowding which results in unmet physical needs, e.g. feeding, changing of infant napkins and rest periods.¹² Orebanjo,¹³ reports that 62.5 percent of the women with children in day care centres believed that their children suffered from accidents or illness due to poor child care. In addition, dangerous practices such as the administration of tranquilising drugs to keep children, particularly infants, less active have been noted.¹⁴ Fadayomi¹⁵ also notes the inadequacy of many child care settings which are comprised of uncompleted buildings, and sites without safe water supply or sanitary toilet facilities.

The daily programme of the young children is another area where problems have been consistently noted. Child care environments in Nigeria often lack the levels of visual, verbal and tactile stimulation which are perceived necessary for the young child. Interaction between children and adults is often limited. There are often few opportunities for outdoor play or creative work, both of which are deemed to be critical for the physical and emotional development of the young child. In the pre-primary sections the instructional method and the academic work assigned is often too advanced for the child's level.

The curriculum issue is closely linked to the training of the carers which varies considerably. In many cases although the proprietors of day cares are well trained, the same is not true of the staff. Dare's¹⁶ survey of proprietors indicates that 64 percent were former teachers, 22 percent nurses and 14 percent traders. Her sample may, however, be biased toward the more professional end of the proprietors spectrum, since her respondents were self-enrolled, fee-paying participants at a special day care training session. Proprietors with a less professional outlook may have chosen not to participate. The proprietor's level of training may not be the critical variable with relation to curriculum. Most centres with more than 20 children rely on additional employees most of whom are largely untrained. It is these young women and not the proprietors who interact with the children. In some cases the proprietors are often away from the Centres for a good portion of the day and thus are unable to mediate the interaction between children and staff. When the proprietors in Dare's sample were asked about their most critical problems, staff retention and lack of training among staff were frequently mentioned. In addition they requested assistance in developing curricula for young children.

Clearly, more investigations are required to adequately document the quality of childcare currently available; however, the present data clearly indicates that the child care available to most children is merely custodial and does not provide for the educational, social, emotional and the health and safety needs of the child. Although there are exceptions, most, child care centres place children in jeopardy.

The relationship between the socio economics status of the family and the quality of child care available is another area requiring thorough investigation. In large urban areas like Lagos and Ibadan, fee paying nursery schools have been

available to the parents of preschool age children for over 15 years. Tuition at nursery schools in quite high and the elitist nature of such institutions has been noted repeatedly.¹⁷ Current fees in Lagos range from ₦150 - ₦300 per term.¹⁸ This represents more than women on the lower levels of the modern sector make in one month. Although there is no direct correlation between cost of a nursery school and its quality, Durojaiye¹⁹ indicates that over 60 percent of the nursery schools she surveyed in Ibadan were of good to high quality. In the present economy the pre school children of women working in lower levels of the modern sector are denied access to such facilities.

This lack of access is significant not only in terms of assistance to working women but also from the perspective of early childhood development. Recent longitudinal research in the United States²⁰ has shown that attendance in well run pre-school programmes does have significant and lasting effects on measures of academic performance including classroom achievement, grade retention, placement in special classes and standardised test scores. Although the literature on the effects of nursery school attendance are more limited in Nigeria, both Dada and Roberts report significantly better academic performance among Primary I and II students who attended nursery schools than among their peers who were non attenders.²¹ While Roberts reports possible effects of social class, Dada finds no such effect. Working class children are *ipso facto* denied access to nursery education while the affluent are free to purchase. Thus, class divisions are perpetuated by limiting the poor child's opportunities for comparative success within the formal educational system which it enters at age six. While the wealthy child receives a head start, the child of lower class parents has been given a back row seat.

The Federal Government currently endorses this inequality through its National Policy on Education which specifically states that government will take the responsibility of training pre-primary teachers while leaving the provision of pre-primary institutions to private individuals and voluntary organisations.

The relationship between quality of out-of-home care and social class for very young children between six weeks and three years is also complex. Orebanjo²² in a study of lower wage earning women in a medium sized university town where day care is a relatively new phenomenon, found that these women spent up to 27 percent of their salaries on out of home care with which they were largely dissatisfied. In small communities where day care is a seller's market, the price is high and the quality low. In larger towns where greater variance may be found in the quality of child care available it appears that the superior centres are beyond the reach of the average working woman. The monthly fee at an average priced centre will exact 19 percent of the salary of a woman on the lower end of the salary scale, and 9.6 percent and 2.5 percent from women in the middle and the top ranges, respectively. These percentages are often significantly higher since many working women will have two children under school age. Women at the lower economic levels who work primarily to support the very existence of their children through the purchase of food, clothing, medical care and school books, face the contradiction of placing the intellectual and social development of their youngest children at risk while trying to keep the whole family alive and

POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REGULATION OF CHILD CARE

Fapohunda²³ describes a continuum along which government policies toward child care can be identified. At one extreme the government assumes a 'laissez faire' approach, leaving child care arrangements to parents while assuming that "market forces directed by the profit motive will assure their availability." A second position on the continuum finds government performing a regulatory function, attempting to safeguard the well being of children in care, but neither providing nor encouraging the expansion of child care services by non-government agencies through provision of technical assistance, the reduction of capital costs, or staff training. A government may also take full responsibility for the provision and regulation of child care.

An examination of child care policy in Nigeria employing Fapohunda's continuum indicates that government policy varies depending on whether the service is perceived as child care or education, and also that policy is currently in a state of flux moving in the direction of increased government involvement. First, it should be noted that nursery schools with their extended day programmes function primarily as sources of child care for high wage earners and as such will be considered a child care option, similar to the other options noted earlier in this discussion. The Nigerian government, however, replicating the situation found in Britain and the United States makes a distinction between child care and child education. Policy development and execution for child care are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture at the federal level, and at state level is usually allocated to the Ministry of Health or Social Welfare, regardless of the age of the child. On the other hand, pre-primary institutions are regulated by the Ministry of Education.

Thus, a distinction between child care and supervision, and child education is made in theory; and although such a distinction is often difficult in practice, its existence has had significant effects on policy development and execution. The overall result is a rather uneven child care policy where educational institutions have an officially articulated policy and child care institutions lag far behind.

The current situation with respect to nursery education is equivalent to Fapohunda's description of government policy which, in addition to regulation, encourages expansion by non-government agencies through provision of various technical supports. Nursery schools in Western Nigeria have been regulated by the state Ministry of Education since 1967. Regulations determine the following aspects of pre-school education staff, including teacher qualifications and staff-child ratios, building and accommodation including: facilities, equipment and health and safety measures, and fees. The ordinance also provides for inspection of facilities both prior to and following government approval. Furthermore, the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (revised 1981) devotes Section II to a discussion of Pre-primary Education where emphasis is given to among other items, the nature and purpose of pre-school, the provision of pre-primary education and teacher qualifications. The policy clearly states that the government will not be responsible for pre-school provision; however, the government does undertake

to train pre-primary teachers and to develop curricula and curriculum materials. The ramifications of this policy for social and educational inequality and for the preservation of the gap between the urban rich and the masses have already been highlighted above.

By contrast, out-of-home child care and supervision has been, until very recently, victim of a 'laissez faire' position on the part of government. Child care has been largely unregulated by state governments throughout Nigeria and is operated primarily as a business venture by private individuals. As recently as 1981, an individual wishing to enter the child care business could be tossed between the Ministries of Social Welfare, Health and Education without any clear statement of policy regarding such operations. Where minimal guidelines existed they were often inoperative and remained unknown because no staff existed to articulate them. The issue of enforcement did not arise. This laissez faire attitude is also reflected in the fact that in none of Nigeria's national development plans has the issue of child care been addressed.

Concern for and awareness of the deplorable conditions of out of home care were voiced continually during the (1979) International Year of the Child and have recently received support from several governmental and quasi-governmental agencies and groups, including the National Committee on Women in Development, the Federal Ministry of Social Development, the National Child Welfare Committee, and UNICEF.

The publishing of Guidelines for the Development of Day Care Centres by the Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture in 1982, coupled with the attempts of this Ministry's Social Welfare Unit to develop and organise training programmes for child care attendants represents a preliminary step toward a shift from a laissez faire to a regulatory position. It is the responsibility of the state governments, however, to fully articulate and enforce such guidelines, and it is at the state level where many such guidelines meet sudden death. The passage of a bill regulating the establishment child care centres in Lagos State in 1983 and the development of a registration system in Oyo State, also in the same year, may suggest that a change in government orientation is actually occurring. However, before any shift to a regulatory position can be fully consolidated, it is not enough to have ordinances published in state gazettes. It is also necessary to staff and finance the regulating agency if it is to be effective.

In spite of these steps toward regulation there is a major limitation in the resolution of the child care crisis in Western Nigeria. The guidelines and regulations noted above exist completely independent of any articulated goals for child care at the state or national level. The Federal Government of Nigeria, both civilian and military, has not considered one of the major problems of working mothers; namely, the care of their young children during working hours, worthy of the serious reflection and study which would result in a National Policy on Children or Child care. Although a National Committee of Child Welfare was established in 1982, no public pronouncements have emanated from it. At present, the government has no official commitment to child care for any categories of workers, social class withstanding.

In fact, the minimal gains which the development of various guidelines and ordinances reflect has been the direct result of the pressure of working mothers themselves, and because these women are members of the bourgeois elite they have not concerned themselves with the child care problems of fellow working mothers who are not members of their class. Poor working mothers, conversely, often lack the organisational base and the sense of confidence which emanates from it, to demand from the government or their employers their right to child care which is qualitative and inexpensive. In many cases in the absence of the extended family and domestic help they are unaware of what the possible range of child care options should or could be.²⁴ Furthermore, it should be recognised that, given the present political economy in Nigeria, even if a National Policy on Child Care were developed one has no reason to expect that it would be equitable and just, or that in its practical application it would serve the needs of poor working mothers. The National Policy on Education has illustrated this fact.

CONCLUSION

The resolution and, in fact, the very articulation of the problems of child care and women's work are deeply rooted in a society's values and practice, and fundamental to the very organisation of the society itself. Although attempts maybe made at solving the child care problem of working women in Western Nigeria these attempts will be mere window dressing which allows women of the elite to falsely think that they are one step closer to sexual equality. It is only when the people of Nigeria have created a government committed, not to the accumulation of individual wealth by a few but to a just and fair society where full human potential can be recognised and developed, that the questions of child care for all categories of working women (and men) can be addressed and resolved. It is only in a society where women on a collective basis exercise self-determination and participate in the fullest sense in the generation and the execution of the policies that affect their lives that the problems of child care will be struggled over, and in time, eventually resolved.

FOOTNOTES

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15. Fadayomi et al 1977 *op cit*.
16. Dare 1981 *op cit*.

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