

Full-time Maternal Employment and Strategies to Compensate the Lost Time to Boost Social-Emotional Development of Young Children

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Abstract. *This paper highlights full-time maternal employment and the strategies used by mothers to foster social-emotional development of their children aged 0-5years in Dar-es-Salaam. The data used in this paper was collected in a qualitative study that involved 42 mothers, their children, and domestic workers. The Attachment Theory was used to analyze the mother-child relationship and its implication for the social - emotional development of children. It is argued that the long duration of maternal absence without a quality relationship with children or unreliable secondary childcare arrangement affected children's early development at different levels. Strategies used by mothers to compensate the lost time with children were identified. The Attachment Theory was used to explain the nature of attachment relationship between working mothers and their children. However, the conclusion was reached that social-emotional development is a complex phenomenon which should also be addressed by theories beyond psychology like theories from sociology and anthropology.*

Key words: *social-emotional development, maternal employment, attachment, care giving*

Introduction

Social-emotional development (SED) in young children denotes children's capacity to develop self-confidence, trust, autonomy, empathy, exploration, and readiness to learn different skills (Thompson, 2018). These social - emotional milestones arise from experience of warm and sensitive relationship with primary caregivers, who are usually the mother or guardian capable of offering an affectionate and consistent care giving experience to the child for a positive outcome (Aryani et al., 2018). SED in early childhood starts with bonding with their primary caregivers (Cohen, 2016). This bond enables the mother or maternal surrogate to timely respond to the child's needs through soothing or curdling the infant. For infants and toddlers, consistent availability fosters trust and confidence to caregivers. Besides, warm and protective relationship with the child leads the infant to develop seeking behaviour of the caregiver or maternal figure during the time of distress for protection known as attachment figure (Malik & Marwaha, 2020; Stefanovi-Stanojevi et al., 2015).

Maternal employment (ME), which refers to access of females to paid labour force, has grown rapidly in the past two decades in Tanzania, which was not traditionally there (Integrated Labour Force Survey- ILFS 2014; Fox, 2016). Such growth into the paid workforce has been facilitated by growing female access to formal education, empowerment and skill training, all of which are regarded as essential for poverty reduction and gender equity rights in Tanzania (Mkenda, 2014; Opoku et al., 2021). ME is shown to significantly affect mothers' parenting roles, child development and contribution of women on young children's SED (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Mkenda, 2014).

Full-time maternal employment outside the home is shown to affect young children's SED by limiting quality time with children and sensitive parenting. According to Fox (2016) and Lokina et al. (2018) female employment is higher in urban areas where most families are nuclear than in rural areas. In Tanzania, employed women or those seeking employment are aged 18-49 years, making 49 percent of the total population. Incidentally, those with secondary and university education are well represented in the formal sector (ILFS, 2014; NBS, 2017; Opoku et al., 2021). Most of these women have young children below the age of five years, in need of close attention, monitoring and care of their mothers (ILFS, 2014; NBS, 2012).

The employment of mothers with young children challenges the conventional concept of family division of labor, in which women are traditionally assigned to the duty of caring and raising young children in the home-based economy (Fox, 2016; Lokina et al., 2016). Mothers participate in multiple roles which further may alter how and who cares for young children, especially in urban settings where the extended family or adult support in child rearing may be limited in the households. This may expose children to higher challenges of quality care and protection (Mkenda, 2014; Mhando & Kayuni, 2019).

Theoretical Consideration

This study was informed by Bowlby (1969/1982, 1980) and Ainsworth (1978) attachment theory. This theory emphasises the importance of quality child-mother relationships on SED and general child well-being in early years of life. Attachment is an affective bond that develops in the context of the relationship between infants and their primary caregivers. These primary caregivers could be the child's biological mother or another maternal substitute who consistently provide them affection, warmth and protection in times of need and its impact endures through lifespan, space and time binding the two, affecting child outcomes (Cassidy, 2008; Murray &

Palaiologou, 2018). Attachment fosters a deep and long-lasting affective relationship between a dependable and protective primary caregiver to a child. These become secure bases when a child is threatened (Cassidy, 2008; Winston & Chicot, 2016). A consistent, warm and sensitive relationship with young children is crucial in the development of social, emotional, cognitive, and personality development (Shirvanian & Michel, 2017). Apparently, predictability and consistency help in creating the environment of trust and sense of security, leading to secure attachment (World Health Organization [WHO], 2004).

Repetitive and reliable experiences of relationship and care giving form brain connections, which lay the foundation for the development of trust, self-esteem, behavioural regulation and secure attachment contributing to a healthy and happy childhood (Waldfogel et al., 2002; Winston & Chicot, 2016). Securely attached children to loving and protective primary caregivers can be explorative, self-confident, and form positive interpersonal relationships (Crouch, 2015). Depending on care giving experiences, some children develop resilience in the face of adversities, extra-life skills qualities such as emotional regulation and healthy social skill, suggesting individual differences. Lack or unreliable primary caregiver-child relationship may lead to attachment disorders and psychopathologies. These may disrupt the future developmental stages leading to negative impact on the cognitive, neurological, social and emotional functioning and other behavioural challenges in children (Shirvanian & Michael, 2017; van Ijzendoorn, 2017; Crouch, 2015).

Social-emotional skills and secure attachment in young children are promoted through quality time for child-primary caregiver relationship which may include feeding, touch, smile, scent, in-arm-holding, playing together or curdling of the child (Levy & Orlans, 1998). Long absences due to full-time participation in the workforce, job-related exhaustion and stress may interfere with sensitive and supportive parenting necessary to develop secure attachment (Hienrich, 2014).

This primary bonding to affective and protective attachment figures create a mental matrix for long term internal working model that shape the child's memories, beliefs, expectations and types of future relationships (Cohen, 2016; Stefanovi-Stanojevi et al., 2015). Children who experience loving relationship from primary caregivers creates positive expectations about others, are sociable, trusting and have robust social-emotional functions which are foundation of social competency and behavioural development (Stroufe, 2005; Crouch, 2014). Unreliable care giving and insecure

attachment in young children may be risk factors to a wide range of behavioral and psychopathologies. Children may experience long-term anxiety, sadness, social isolation, low self-esteem, and poor adjustment in lifespan (Ashiko, 2017). It also plays a crucial role in the regulation of stress, anxiety, illness or creation of resilience against life challenges in children (van Ijzendoorn, 2019; Shirvanian & Michael et al., 2017).

Methodology

The data for this article were generated in a study conducted in March-June 2019. Data collection employed an exploratory research design, using qualitative methods to explain the strategies full-time employed mothers use to compensate for the lost time with children to foster SED. The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam because the city recorded the highest population of female employment in the reproductive active age of 18- 49 years (NBS, 2012; ILFS, 2014). Forty-two (42) mothers on full-time employment, both in private and public institutions, irrespective of their residential areas were included in the sample. In addition, through incidental sampling (Nindi, 2014) seven domestic workers (DWs) caring for children in the households, and five children aged between four and five years were included in the sample. The involvement of domestic workers and children was suggested by mothers when they could not provide certain data, or believed that these could provide first-hand information to enrich the obtained information from mothers. DWs who had spent longer time in the family had a greater understanding of children and had higher possibility of influencing children's development. Thematic analysis (TA) was used in the analysis of data following recording verbatim, transcription and analysis. TA enabled the researcher to accurately establish the link between concepts and themes in respect to the replicated data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Kinondoni, as a study location, is one of the five municipalities of the Dar es Salaam Region, which has the highest population, of 1,775,049 people, according to the 2012 census, with a diverse population of higher, middle, and low income people with purely urban and semi-rural realities (NBS, 2013). Larger female employment and varied social-economic representations on its inhabitants would suggest different care giving arrangements and living location in Dar es Salaam and Coastal Regions.

Results

The examination of strategies used by mothers to compensate for the lost time with children illustrated several mechanisms including self-confidence building by mothers and use of incentives to children.

Negotiating employment and early childcare

One of the most difficult challenges for mothers according to this study was juggling work and child rearing. Mothers valued both child bearing and employment. The most difficult challenge was to find sufficient time for interaction with children. In the mothers' absence, secondary care giving under domestic workers (DWs) for infants and toddlers was the primary mode of childcare. Children aged between three and five years had mixed childcare arrangements; mostly home-based care and institutional care (day care and pre-school).

According to this study, mothers were intuitively aware of the possible detrimental effects of unreliable secondary care giving and the importance of their close relationship with children for their healthy development; as such, they devised various strategies to compensate for the lost time with children. Such strategies included, investing quality time with children, maintaining communication, gift giving, and family excursions as efforts to foster children's SED. At the same time, employment was an important and liberating factor for families. Employment imbued mothers' self-esteem, financial independence, dignity as well as better parenting skills. Well-paid mothers felt their employment benefited their children's development through provision of various resources like purchasing care and family well-being. Mothers could easily reinvest their incomes to provide for their children in any way they saw suitable. This imbued in them self-confidence, autonomy and could respond better to children's material and psychological needs as explained by the following participant:

“A confident and satisfied woman can more easily respond to psychological and all the needs of her children and overcome family poverty, which I think is more destructive on children's development than anything else” (Interview, Mother, banker, May, 2019).

Such contention echoes the argument by Grantham-McGregor et al. (2007) on maternal employment, that in the developing countries employment contributes to reduction of family poverty which is detrimental on young children's SED. Poverty affects children's holistic development, such as physical and SED (WHO, 2004). It impedes children from realising their full potential by frustrating their quality of life by spoiling their dreams, beliefs, attitudes, and may spoil their behaviour due to lack of resources (WHO, 2004, 2019; UNICEF, 2019).

However, despite the confidence arising from paid employment, mothers struggled to balance their multiple roles, such as family, work, social-

economic activities and self-care. These were sources of stress and strain, and they negatively influenced the quality of their relationship with children. Yet, mothers were unwilling to give up their careers in order to be housewives and raise children. Paid work was financially and socially more rewarding than being a stay-at-home mother. Mothers received several benefits from employment and side jobs, which supported their children's SED by providing them with various resources as explained by the following respondent:

“...through my job I can freely contribute financially to my family. I can support our children’s education, good nutrition, health, and good living conditions compared to other women who stay at home. I think that good nutrition and living conditions are the best things” (Interview mother, banker, April, 2019).

Many mothers associated good childcare with the provision of material goods, such as nutrition, living conditions, access to good schools, health insurance, to healthy childrearing absconding the critical importance of close, warm, and reliable supportive relationships with children. Some mothers felt employment was an empowering tool that provided them with various opportunities for improving their lives, parenting skills, family economy, and equality in family. This is explained by the following participant:

“...as for me, employment has increased my self-value and positive relationship in my family and with others. This has strongly influenced me to develop amicable relationship with my husband, children and the entire family. It has made my home happier and less stressed which favours close relationship with everyone because I can pay other house helpers to allow me more family time (IDI, Mother, engineer, May, 2019).

However, although mothers appreciated the emancipating power of paid work, they were inconsistent in providing adequate time for interaction and care of their children. Although a friendly family environment was beneficial to children's psychological development, it was insufficient to meet the children's need for maternal sensitive parenting (Cassidy, 2008). Long work-related absences, exhaustion, and stress all hampered responsive parenting. Other factors such as the nature of work, earnings, distance to work, position, availability of secondary care giving arrangements, and individual differences, all had a negative impact on children's attachment and SED. Participation in the workforce limited mothers' time for consistent

care and relationship with children as a result they employed DWs for childcare. These were generally very young inexperienced young girls below eighteen years. These spent daily long hours with children than parents. Gradually, they became either attachment figures or role models of the children in good or bad. Positive experiences of attachment to caregivers is shown by the following respondent:

“...my employment takes away a lot of time that I should be spending with my children, as a result they are closer to their nanny than me. They imitate everything from her. I do not have much time to make follow-up of or spend much time with my children....”
(Interview Mother, Senior lecturer, May, 2019).

As previously demonstrated, childbearing, raising healthy children, and working were all important aspects of mothers' lives (Mkenda, 2014). Paid work enabled mothers to re-invest their earnings in the well-being of their children, which is also necessary for children's social-emotional and cognitive development (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). Despite these advantages, work limited time for childrearing and consistent relationship with children, which affected negatively attachment to mothers. Many mothers spent a significant amount of time at work, or on commuting, which for some exceeded six hours. Further, almost all mothers participated in multiple social-economic activities after work, either to gain extra-income or because of some social imperatives. Other mothers' job satisfaction led them to spend extra time at work, extending their time away from children which influenced the nature of attachment with children. In this circumstances the use of domestic workers to substitute mothers in childcare and domestic work was unavoidable.

The use of secondary caregivers or female DWs as maternal substitutes in childcare served multiple roles. It was a good strategy for enabling mothers to maintain a job, ensuring childcare, supported in domestic chores and reduced anxiety and tension in parents over child care giving. Having a DW for childcare influenced positively or negatively on children's SED. Positive experience foster self-confidence and security on children while negative experience exposed them to various forms of insecurities such as child abuse, neglect and anxieties as suggested by Mogoalthe (2019) and Otieno (2018). Some experiences of child abuse and other forms of insecurities were associated with different compounding factors such as domestic workers learned parenting skills, interest in childcare, stress and strain due to heavy workload, or child's temperament. Others had little interest in childcare because they were forced into this work to support their families

back home. DWs in the households shouldered heavy workloads in care giving and domestic chores, which sometimes rendered them impatient when they failed to balance the multiple roles. At times, DWs are exhausted and dissatisfied with their work, and so became unresponsive to children's needs or abused them when they failed to control their emotions.

Experiences of increasing cases of child abuse and other insecurities from caregivers in Dar es Salaam in relation to childcare is also reported by other studies such Mogoalthe (2019) and Otieno (2018). They argue that children may face different challenges such as abuse, neglect, sometimes murder or rape because their primary caregivers are occupied in some other activities outside the home, instead of full-time child rearing (Otieno (2018). However, children develop strong attachment and feel safe with warm and protective caregivers. Infants and toddlers sought comfort, holding, help, or soothing, even in the presence of their mothers in some cases. They were comfortable and trusting. This seeking behaviour was more evident when children were distressed or when there was a stranger. Mothers were happy when they noticed that their children were securely attached to their nannies as explained by a mother:

"...our nanny is very good with my children; they really love her and most of the time they prefer her to me. They are very fond of one another. I enjoy seeing them play and laugh together. My youngest son prefers to be nurtured and soothed by her whenever he feels threatened by anything. He also prefers to sleep with her even though he is only two years old. This consoles me a lot. I find them happy and thriving well (Interview, mother, banker, May, 2019).

The seeking behaviour and child preference to responsive DWs reflects Shirvanian and Michael (2017) and Cassidy (2008) contention that children can bond to caregivers who provide consistent and sensitive care giving in times of needs. To them children develop seeking behaviour and preferences to others. In this study DWs served as maternal surrogates and attachment figures and role models for children. Children established a positive relationship with them, and were confidants to whom older children could disclose their "secrets" more than to their mothers because they provided the security and protection they needed. In these circumstances, children appeared happy and comfortable even after the departure of their mothers. This was made evident when a respondent said:

".... My mother goes to work before I wake up every day, every day... and comes back when we are sleeping again... my 'dada'

(nanny) does everything for me and my brother. She cooks good food for us and feeds my brother. She talks and plays with us a lot...she also prepares everything for us and our parents. She teaches us good things. I want her to be my sister. I really love her. Our 'dada' is very good to everyone... I told my mom our dada really loves us... (Conversation with a child, May, 2019).

As shown above, some children developed a stronger attachment to responsive and loving caregivers even more than their mothers. These became children's mentors and role models, regardless of their age, or background because they were persons who spent longer time with children as suggested by Shirvanin & Michael (2017) and Crouch (2014). These studies suggest that children will attach to any available and supportive caregivers, and not just their mothers. Children are likely to learn different behaviours, from their caregivers, which were sometimes contrary to the family culture and way of life.

Some DWs sometimes exposed children to various forms of insecurities and challenges, such as neglect or different forms of abuses. For example, during this study in the households, two children showed canes hidden in different corners of the house or bedrooms where mothers could not see them easily. These canes were actually used on children or were meant to threaten them when they misbehaved. This caused fear, tension and anxiety in children, but often could not report to parents for fear of further punishment from their caregivers in their parents' absence. Oblivious to parents' knowledge, some children had healing signs of cane rushes in different parts of their bodies or expressed different forms of anxieties or health challenges like lack of appetite and wasting which mothers could not understand the root cause. Child insecurities in other children created apprehensiveness, sadness, and behavioural problems which motivated families to strategize other mechanisms to compensate for the lost time with children as will be in the next section.

Compensation of lost time for social-emotional development of children

Employment and participation in multiple roles left mothers exhausted, and with very limited time to raise and consistently attend to their children themselves. Mothers were intuitively aware of the potentially negative effects of their long absence on their children's healthy development. Participation in multiple roles was strenuous, depriving them emotional availability for children which impacted negatively on attachment security and behavioural development of children. Some mothers could hardly make close follow-up on children during work days. Yet, they were aware of the

possible detrimental effects of their long absences in the lives of their children. In response to these challenges, mothers strategized different mechanisms to compensate for the lost time. Among others, these included investment in quality time with children, family excursions, maintaining communication, playing with children and avoiding to carry homework to maximise time with children, as will be shown in the following sections

Investment in quality time with children

The how and the quality of time invested for relationship with children depended much on individual differences, nature of work, distance from work station, mother's endowment, and participation in other roles. Time for all employed mothers was a precious resource to be split in order to fulfil multiple tasks with different implications on the relationship with children. Regardless of the lack for appropriate and quality time for connection with their young children, mothers were put in the position of having to choose between options. Having children and work were both crucial for them. Children provided them with meaning and identity as African women consolidating their marital lives by bringing joy to themselves and families. At the same time employment empowered them, to provide for children and the family. Mothers in the family took up a leadership role in caring and sustaining the well-being of their children and family at large which was transformative in the lives of mothers and children, but was difficult balancing many roles at the same time.

However, despite the difficulty in juggling between multiple roles, some mothers made efforts to find time with children and maximised their presence with children, which made the children happy and attached to them. Others struggled more not only to find time to connect with children but to find the serenity necessary for sensitive parenting. They were always too tired and stressed to create sensitive and responsive relationships with their children. Yet, surprisingly while some mothers made efforts to connect with children, others took an avoidant behaviour for fear that their infants would attach to them. This led to delegation of caring role to DWS as shown in the testimony of a participant when she said:

“Generally I avoid getting too close to my son. I just breastfeed and immediately give him to his nanny. I do not want him to get used to my smell or touch because he will cry too much when I go... unfortunately, after discouraging bonding with me continuously, as he grows up he no longer looks for me. But I don't know why his health has been a challenge all through. He has never been a happy child and now at four years he is developing behavioural problems.

He is defiant and destroys everything, and does not listen. It is terrible, I don't understand him at all..." (IDI, Mother, Senior Secretary, April, 2019).

According to Winston and Chicot (2016), in infants and toddlers bonding with caregivers is developed through a pattern of consistent caring practices or actions such as skin-to-skin contact, curdling, breastfeeding or other forms of non-verbal communications. Inconsistent and disruptive presence of the primary caregiver may lead to maternal deprivation, which can be detrimental to children's psychological health (van Ijzendoorn, 2019; Shirvannian & Michal, 2017). Low or lack of maternal warmth and responsiveness to infants and toddlers may lead to different behavioural and health challenges as they grow up due to lack of time or maternal disposition to bond with a child. However, unlike this mother's approach, other mothers made efforts to bond with their children by maintaining frequent communication with them to ensure continuity of relationship with them.

Maintaining communication with children

According to this study, many pre-school children spend a significant amount of time with DWs. The majority of these DWs are inexperienced or unreliable in early childcare and household management. On this basis, mothers felt compelled to keep a close eye on their small children and DWs by communicating frequently throughout the day. Frequent contacts are intended to supervise caregivers, ensure the safety and well-being of children as well as to mitigate the impacts of long maternal absence. During working hours, some mothers used various communication forms, such as regular videos calls through WhatsApp, phone conversations and text messaging with caregivers. Video calling was found the most appealing even at a very young age. Mothers could see, easily talk and interact with children to reinforce bonding with their children and assure themselves the security of their children and that they received the necessary care. However, video calling was only common among upper-income families because they could afford to provide caregivers with phones and airtime vouchers. Low-income earners primarily used phone calling and messaging to the DW. Others relied on their neighbours to keep an eye on their young children under domestic workers and report to them when they called. Three mothers used hidden CCTV cameras that recorded everything that happened in home, alongside frequent communication by phone, while they were away to ensure that their children were safe and received the necessary care on time and appropriately. However, although this provided them with the necessary information, two mothers decided to remove them because the cameras added to their anxiety

and tension when they observed unexpected happenings in the home and poor childcare which affected children's well-being.

Mothers felt using video/phone calls was beneficial because it allowed frequent interaction with their children during the day. Visual contact, listening to children's voices, helped mothers to determine their children's general well-being and was assuring to both mothers and children as it bridged the effects of long absence. Visual contacts aimed at enforcing attachment with children. This shown when a mother said:

“I call or video call home many times during the day to hear or see my little ones and to connect with them. When you video call, you can see how things are actually. This helps somehow. When children see me, they feel happy and know that they are not left alone. Seeing and talking to children create expectations and has a strong connecting power” (IDI, Mother, accountant, May, 2019).

This finding is similar to Rudi, et al. (2014) study on the use of communication technologies among working parents in the United States to connect with children. The use of communication technologies among working mothers effectively bridged the effects of long working hours from children by connecting them to each other. These communication means ranged from text messages, emails, social network sites, and Skype. The intensity of use of communications increased with the child's age and furthered connectedness between parents and children to reduce the impact of long absences. However, the outcome of these communications on children depended on the child's age and situation.

In this study, mothers' frequent connection with children at home had dual functions; to ascertain children's well-being and to by reduce tension and anxiety on mothers over the security of their children by connecting mothers to their children. Mothers through these contacts could offer guidance to caregivers and assurance to children in their absence which was binding. However, while this had positive impact on children, sometimes the method was not always successful as it could not be equal to physical presence. Sometimes domestic workers were uncooperative by either not picking the phone or providing limited information. It was also noted that while some mothers believed that maintaining such contacts was positive and effective, some DWs managed to manipulate the situation. They showed mothers the positive side while hiding the negative aspects of the reality to avoid problems with their employers or the risk of losing their job. For example, a

DW who reported not to understand the effectiveness of video or phone calling on safety and closeness to the child said:

“... I don't understand how a mother would expect to capture everything in a video call and provide affection to the child. If you have messed up, how can you show that scenario to her? It is possible to show the good side of the reality to avoid too many quarrels and the risk of being sucked from your work. Children cannot feel the love of a mother in the video” (Conversation with a domestic worker, June, 2019).

The above observation suggests the possible limitation of phone and video calling to ascertain child well-being. The receiver could prepare and show the positive side and fleece the negative side just to impress the mother while the child could be at risk. The use of phones had both positive and negative aspects on children. Conversely, unsupervised by their caregivers, children learned many things on smart phones. Children spent long hours playing games which were addictive while the older ones through smart phones could be easily exposed to inappropriate sites which would put them at the risk of abuse and learning inappropriate behaviours. Too much time on the phone or watching cartoons limited time children would use for socialization with others. In line with this, one respondent said:

“I gave my DW a phone to facilitate communication with children and make follow up on what is happening with children or give instructions during the day. Unfortunately, my children spend a long time playing games with it. I just learned that they also visit unfavourable sites for their age...” (Interview, mother, manager, June 2019).

This study concluded that the use of phones, text messaging and video calling for communication and connecting children with their mothers was helpful if well supervised, but was not sufficient to substitute maternal care and binding the two. Excessive or unsupervised use of smart phones may cause some behavioural problems learned from it such as aggression and limiting socialization with others.

Ray and Jat's (2010) experiences in India show that, television, movies, video games, smartphones, and other social networks which were assuming central roles in the lives of young children had both positive and negative effects on young children's social, emotional, cognitive and behavioural development. Excessive media use was shown to cause health challenges

such as obesity and addiction which hindered the development of healthy social skills. Other than calling home some families used family excursions to foster parents-children relationship as will be seen below.

Family excursions for exclusive time with children

Kızıltaş and Sak (2018) on the integrating excursions for pre-school children to foster SED, found that, such occasions were effective in fostering knowledge and skills. It offered children with experiences to acquire social-emotional experiences which helped to develop positive emotions towards themselves, others and their surroundings. Children who are emotionally healthy had positive relationships with peers and adults (Trawick-Swith, 2013). Family excursions and holidays were used to strengthen family cohesion and attachment with children. This allowed mothers to dedicate exclusive time with children. However, these were too sporadic experiences due to lack of time and economic resources in families, but was a valuable one. In these occasions, mothers with infants and toddlers spent longer time cuddling, talking, and feeding as opportunities for bonding. Also, this was somehow to compensate for lost family time during workdays but such sporadic experiences was an insufficient condition for developing a secure attachment among infants and toddlers. This is shown when one of the participants said:

“...work demands allow very limited time with children. So, as family, we developed a tradition of arranging outings or holidays with children. We generally visit different places such as city malls, national parks, relatives or other places whenever possible. This helps us to develop closeness with each other and understand the behaviour of children in some ways, although this is not enough. But to be honest, we do this because my husband earns very well and children enjoy such experiences. We find this experience as binding us as a family, and moments for relaxation” (IDI, Mother, Manager, June, 2019).

Time and consistency in relationship are crucial for bonding with children. Sporadic family excursions may not suffice the conditions for developing secure attachment. Therefore, it can be said that the strategy is good but insufficient to develop secure attachment with children. Other mothers used are gift giving as a means to foster social-emotional development in young children as shown in the next section.

Gift giving to connect with children

The sociological and psychological understanding of gift-giving focuses on the importance of gifts in building relationships (Servátka, et al., 2011; Caremer, 2011). Gift giving was assumed to be a gesture of love and affection. Mothers used gifts as a symbol of manipulation to win children's affection. Some made it a tradition to go home with something in the hands to draw children to them. This is what a mother said in this regard:

“Most of the time, I come with some gifts for my two children such as freshly fried potato chips, crisps or biscuits to their delight. They always expect some gift from me. I want to show my love to them (IDI, primary school teacher, June 2019, Msasani).

Gift-giving was expected to win affection and closeness to children. But the meaning of gifts was uncertain to infants since they could not understand the gestures. According to some mothers, the most rewarding gift to children was, when they could spend longer time holding, curdling, or playing with children, showing affection and closeness. In many cases, gift giving was not only meant only to increase love and bonding with children but some mothers used gifts to appease their own sense of guilt for lack of time for enough mothering. Constant gift giving had different responses from children. In large families with limited resources, gifts were sporadic, and therefore had positive outcomes on children. Gifts were valued more and were seen as a sign of love and affection from parents hence was binding. Conversely, in the case of well-off families with a single or two children, flooding children with many gifts to win their affection often had unexpected results. It became normal, therefore gifts were not binding. Children were shown to value more time together showing affection and warmth than material gifts shown when a respondent said:

“We make sure we give them good and significant gifts such as iPads. All have bicycles, computers, expensive clothing and many other valuable items... we expect to make them happy and will translate this as a sign of love and affection to them. But sometimes these things seem not to create the expected response; our children prefer our time and affection. Sometimes the joy of receiving such gifts fades away very soon and they remain sad if we are not close enough to them” (Interview, mother, June, 2019).

Time and quality of interaction and supportive care with children is shown to hold higher importance in children than gift giving. Gifts were appreciated if

such gesture was followed by affective gestures like talking with children, playing, holding or other forms which showed closeness and care to them.

Children's demand for time and affection to develop closer relationships and attachment to parents agree with the attachment theoretical proposition that bonding develops through quality time for caring practices which some mothers provided. This happens through talking, close and intimate relations through curdling and other non-verbal communications with infants and toddlers, as suggested by Winston and Chicot (2016) which may not consist of quality of presence. However, gifts alone cannot replace parental warmth and supportiveness; they must be accompanied by other signs of love and warmth to children. Other than gift giving, some mothers sought other ways of maximising time with children such as not carrying home-works as shown in the next section.

Not carrying work home (working at home)

Avoiding carrying work home was another strategy that some respondents used to get extra time for undistracted interaction with their young children while at home. However, the length of time and how it was used together varied. Some mothers managed to avoid carrying work home while it was difficult for others. The type of work determined whether or not a mother needed to work from home. In the study it was shown that some employment types demanded extra working hours, such as teachers and university lecturers, or those with administrative responsibilities that needed daily morning meetings or teaching. Mothers who were aware of their critical importance of close relationship in their children's healthy development and family time, made all efforts to complete their work during working hours. They would only work from home if they did not have other alternatives. Despite the exhaustion and stress they would be experiencing, they reported to spend quality time with children while at home. They spent time talking, nurturing, playing, or doing something together to bond with them until they went to bed. Once children were in bed, mothers worked on their homework until late night or woke up very early in the morning before children woke up, as reported by this mother:

“...when there is too much that I cannot avoid working from home especially when I have to meet deadlines or prepare next day meetings... but since I know my children need me, once I am at home, I give the best of myself to them. Then once in bed, I work until very late in the night and wake up again very early to complete my work without interfering with my interaction with children. I believe time with children is necessary for their health

development... I feel my children are serene and much attached to me” (IDI mother, lawyer, May, /2019).

The quotation above demonstrates that the combination of work and early child rearing necessitates self-giving and significant sacrifice on the part of mothers in order to ensure healthy SED of young children when carrying homework is unavoidable. The mothers' ability to demarcate time for sensitive parenting and homework was shown not to affect children's attachment and growth. Some mothers reported that when they worked home, they had to ensure that their children did not tamper with or destroy office work, therefore, they constantly dismissed them if they did. However, many mothers were aware that this constant dismissive behaviour of children's needs for their attention and care could be interpreted as rejection, rendering them either cold, or weakening their efforts to develop closeness with their mothers, which gradually became reality. This situation was confirmed by a mother who said that:

“...the constant dismissal of my son has made him somehow indifferent with me. He prefers to play outside alone or with other children even when I am at home. He sometimes behaves as if I am not there and looks very sad whenever this happens. Sometimes this hurts me, it feels like he is revenging on me” (Interview, mother, Lecturer, May, 2019).

When caregivers either rejecting or are not responsive to children's emotional needs, they may develop an anxious/ambivalent attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). When a child makes several attempts to gain closeness to an attachment figure and is rejected, he or she will give up and develop behaviours that demonstrate emotional and physical independence. According to Reiz et al. (2018), parents are to a large extent responsible for disorganised attachment. However, in our case, the information available may not be sufficient to classify the child as having a disorganised attachment due to a lack of more contextual care for the child and the nature of the relationship with the mother when not under pressure of work. Yet, other mothers used play as a mode of interacting with children as shown in the next section.

Playing with Children

There were mothers who invested time to play with children and entertain them as a mode of strengthening their relationship. Play helped children to relax, and was binding to each other, although mothers used this strategy when children were less active; thus it was not predictive of creating secure

attachment but assuring to children. The power of play and entertainment activities is also supported by other studies such as Majumdar (2020) and Mabagala (2014). It strengthens neural connections in brain and helps children's brain to develop in positive ways as well as enforcing social skills (Majumdar, 2020).

Conclusion

This study examined maternal employment and the strategies they employ to compensate for lost time with their children. Working and raising children are time intensive, and are both important for children and mothers' well-being. To develop healthy social-emotional skills, young children need reliable and sensitive relationships with primary caregivers who generally is the mother or a reliable maternal substitute as well as resource availability. The continuity of this relationship may be interfered with by maternal full-time employment outside the home and maternal endowment to connect with children. Maternal employment had bi-directional outcome. It had both positive and negative outcomes on children's development. ME supported children's SED through resource provision, better parenting skills and paying for secondary care giving at the same time deprived time for sensitive and supportive parenting due to long absences and job related stress and exhaustion. Most mothers in this study were intuitively aware of the possible detrimental effects of long absences on SED, therefore made efforts to invest quality time with children. They devised various strategies to compensate for the lost time with children. These were family excursions, frequent communications, playing with children, and avoidance of carrying homework to optimise time with children but were not always effective. It is suggested that other mechanisms such as use of crèches and daycare centres, under trained professional in early child development could supplement mothers support for children's SED.

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