

1986

Effects of maternal employment on children

Dianne Elizabeth Rider
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1986 Dianne Elizabeth Rider

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rider, Dianne Elizabeth, "Effects of maternal employment on children" (1986). *Graduate Research Papers*. 3230.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/3230>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

Effects of maternal employment on children

Abstract

The movement of females into the working force is a significant social change affecting families in the United States today. Changes taking place in the structure and lifestyle of the dual-working family have been studied by several researchers. Hall and Hall (1979) report that 42% of couples living in the United States are both employed. The traditional style of family ceases to be the norm (Hall & Hall, 1979; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Hoffman, 1979, 1980; Hohenshil, Hummel & Maddy-Bernstein, 1980). In the early 1980s, only 7 out of 100 United States families consisted of a working father, an unemployed wife, and children (Hoffman, 1979; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1981; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984).

EFFECTS OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT ON CHILDREN

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by
Dianne Elizabeth Rider
May 1986

EFFECTS OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT ON CHILDREN

The movement of females into the working force is a significant social change affecting families in the United States today. Changes taking place in the structure and lifestyle of the dual-working family have been studied by several researchers. Hall and Hall (1979) report that 42% of couples living in the United States are both employed. The traditional style of family ceases to be the norm (Hall & Hall, 1979; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Hoffman, 1979, 1980; Hohenshil, Hummel & Maddy-Bernstein, 1980). In the early 1980's, only 7 out of 100 United States families consisted of a working father, an unemployed wife, and children (Hoffman, 1979; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1981; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984).

Hoffman (1979) lists changes during the last two and a half decades that have influenced mothers to seek employment outside of the home. These factors are: more streamlined household operations, necessity of wife to be employed outside of the home in order to maintain an acceptable standard of living (objective or subjective), fewer children, having the last child at an earlier age, higher education for more women and their demands for better jobs, and more female-headed households. Acknowledging the fact that more mothers are employed, how has this affected the development of children?

Much research has been done concerning the effects of maternal employment on children, and differing points of view appear in the literature (Hoffman, 1980; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Boswell, 1981). One group of researchers and psychologists support the view that if the mother is employed, especially during the infant and preschool years of the child's life, the child's development will be harmed. This conclusion stems primarily from the psychoanalytic view that children can only be raised by their mothers. These researchers and psychologists that bonding does not get a chance to take place if mother and child are separated. However, once the child is of school age, the child may benefit from the mother's employment (Boswell, 1981; Fraiberg, 1977; Nagera, 1975; Etaugh, 1974; Bennett & Reardon, 1985).

Other research supports the proposition that a child can attach to both a mother and a caretaker without having adjustment problems (Etaugh, 1980; Bennett & Reardon, 1985). Schubert (1974) reported that mother-infant communication is not seriously affected by maternal employment.

Studies of attachment behavior in infants and preschoolers while not focusing on maternal employment per se, indicate that strength of attachment to the mother is a function of the

quality and intensity of mother-child interactions, rather than the sheer availability of the mother or the number of caretakers. (Etaugh, 1974, p. 861).

Belsky and Sternberg (1978) and Hoffman (1979) found no adverse effects of quality day care for infants and young children.

Hoffman (1979) stated that "all children need to feel good about themselves...feel loved, capable and effective" (p. 862). Howell, (cited in Olds, 1978) after extensive research on the effects of maternal employment on children, found that, "almost every childhood behavior characteristic and its opposite, can be found among the children of employed mothers" (p. 15). Howell concluded that the following were significant in the lives of children whether their mothers were employed or not;

...equally likely to make friends easily or to have problems getting along with other children, to be good students academically or to fail, to get in trouble or to show model behavior...to love and feel loved by parents or to reject or feel rejected by them. (p. 5)

Farel (1980), Hoffman (1979), and Boswell (1981) also reported that few differences were found between children of employed and nonemployed mothers.

Adjustment of children is a concern of parents. Anderson (1980) found that parental warmth and acceptance are consistently antecedents of child independence and adjustment. Adjustment of elementary children is not adversely affected by maternal employment (Etaugh, 1974; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Farel & Dobelstein, 1982). Schachter (1981) found that preschool children of employed mothers may be different socially and emotionally from children of nonemployed mothers, but are not necessarily better or worse in their overall personality adjustments. Etaugh (1974) reported that a "consistent finding concerning both black and white children is that satisfied mothers, employed or nonemployed, have the best adjusted children" (p. 77). Hoffman (1979) and Stuckey, McGhee and Bell (1982) also reported that satisfied mothers have more positive interactions with their children than do dissatisfied mothers.

With mothers working outside of the home, fathers tend to become more involved with child rearing. Research points to positive effects of greater father involvement in child raising (Booth & Edwards, 1980). Easterbrooks and Goldberg (1984) stated that "the extent of father involvement in child rearing was positively associated with toddler development" (p. 751). Fathers sharing more in parenting tasks has been linked to increased adjustment

in children, higher achievement by girls and enhanced social adjustment in boys. These children tend to have better relationships with their peers, a better sense of humor, and to have stronger self concepts (Brazelton, 1983; Hoffman, 1974; Boswell, 1981; Bennett & Reardon, 1985).

Concerning the amount of time that parents spend with children, Bennett and Reardon (1985) found that employed mothers spent as much time with children as nonemployed mothers do. Hunt and Kiker (1984), however, found that employed mothers spent virtually the same amount of time with preschoolers but that employed mothers spent less time than nonemployed mothers with adolescent children. Smith (1970) observed that "the employed mother may spend less time with her children, but may gain respect from her children for the expertise she has in the world outside of her home" (p. 872). This respect is not likely to be felt until the children are older (Acock, Barker & Bengston, 1982).

Fathers are spending more time with their children (Acock, Barker & Bengston, 1982; Booth & Edwards, 1980). As a result, fathers are becoming more nurturant. Divorced fathers who are extensively involved in child care reported increased expressiveness and sensitivity to the needs of others (Baruch & Barnett, 1981). Mothers and fathers in families where both parents are employed may be

more similar in their parent-child interaction than is the case for the traditional single earner (male) families (Stuckey, McGhee & Bell, 1982; Acock, Barker & Bengston, 1982; Vogel, Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1970; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Hoffman, 1974, 1979).

Fathers in a dual career family are less likely to become workaholics and to have more time to enjoy their children (Boswell, 1981). It appears that parents that care do make time for their children, even when both of them are employed.

The research on the effects of maternal employment on the intellectual ability levels of children is not consistent for boys. Some studies have found that boys in the middle class score lower on intellectual indices. This finding has occurred frequently enough to merit further investigation, reports Hoffman (1979). However, most studies have reported no differences between the achievement and competence levels of girls and boys of employed and nonemployed mothers (Etaugh, 1974; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Farel, 1980).

Looking at another variable, Brazelton (1983) reported that children whose fathers were actively involved with their infancy enter school with higher IQ scores. Research has shown that high-achieving women often show a close relationship with a warm and encouraging father

(Hoffman, 1974; Price-Bonham & Murphy, 1980). It appears that the effects of maternal employment on children are not as significant as the situational variables that affect families, such as father involvement, amount of income or lack thereof, and showing acceptance of the child (Brazelton, 1983).

What developmental characteristics are frequently found in children whose mothers are employed? Hoffman and Nye (1974), Schachter (1981), and Price-Bonham and Murphy (1980), report that the children of employed mothers are more peer-oriented, independent, and resourceful. Independence and responsibility seem to go hand in hand. Dual career parents encourage their children to accept responsibility and to take part in the family chores. Working mothers were less overprotective and more supportive of independence than were the nonworking mothers (Hoffman, 1974).

Children of employed mothers have broadened, less stereotyped, and more positive sex-role concepts (Hoffman, 1974; Bennett & Reardon, 1985; Etaugh, 1974). Hoffman (1979) observed that if their mother is employed, boys see men as warmer and women as more competent. However, Gold and Andres (1978) found that lower class boys of working mothers viewed their fathers more negatively than did boys with nonemployed mothers.

Daughters have a higher evaluation of human competence and are more approving of maternal employment, if their mother is employed (Marantz & Mansfield, 1977; Hoffman, 1974, 1980; Rallings & Nye, 1979; Acock, Barker & Bengston, 1982). The more involved the father is in family raising, the more accepting the children are of their mother's employment (Etaugh, 1974; Hoffman, 1974, 1979; Bennett & Reardon, 1985). Etaugh (1974) found that educational aspirations generally are higher among both sons and daughters of employed mothers.

Maternal employment appears to broaden both the roles of the mother and of the father. This could have a positive effect for the children of working parents, because it will prepare them for what is ahead. Hoffman (1979) reported that the broader range of emotions and skills that each parent presents are more consistent with the adult role the child will play. Parents teach by the roles they play. They do not lose their combined influence on their children when the mother is employed (Acock, Barker & Bengston, 1982). In fact, relating to both parents in a more balanced way is usually viewed as preferable to relating to one parent most of the time (Hoffman, 1979).

Significant social changes are taking place as dual-working families adopt new lifestyles, but societal

accommodations for those changes are often slow in coming. Hoffman (1979) stated that "social institutions, community services, jobs, government policies, mass media presentations, children's literature and individual attitudes all lag behind the facts in their recognition of how common maternal employment has become" (p. 864). There are still few resources for lessening the strains of managing a home and employment.

Much of the recent research of the 1980's focuses on the additional stress and conflict inherent in dual-working families (Bennett & Reardon, 1985). Googins and Burden (cited in Waterloo Courier, Nov. 12, 1985), in a recent Boston University Study, indicate that dual-working families feel that they are "left alone in their struggle to work effectively and juggle family responsibilities also" (p. 6). In the same article, they state: "Corporations are beginning to realize there is a correlation between performance and parenting" (p. 6). Thus, there are indications that ways to better meet the needs of dual working families are beginning to be recognized.

Restructuring in the workplace is needed to accommodate more easily the greater involvement of the father with children (Bennett & Reardon, 1985). New work schedules are being experimented with by businesses, industries and government to give employees more freedom

in planning their daily lives. The four-day, 35-40 hour workweek is one alternative. This makes possible a three-day weekend which can provide longer uninterrupted time to spend with families. Job sharing is a variation of work scheduling. Two people actually share a job. A variety of schemes have been successfully used in job sharing, ranging from rotating six months on the job and six months off the job to splitting each workday (Hohenshil, Hummel & Maddy-Bernstein, 1980; Norris & Miller, 1979).

Opportunities for part-time employment for mother or father during the years when children are in the home would allow child rearing responsibilities to be shared by both parents. This should be possible without being a detriment to job success of either parent.

Providing adequate maternity leave could enhance women's abilities to hold good jobs and concurrently meet the needs of the children. All industrialized nations provide more maternity benefits than does the United States (Beck, 1986).

Paternity leave is another benefit to help families better cope with the stress of adjusting to a newborn and perhaps, to extenuating circumstances surrounding the birth of a child (Waterloo Courier, Nov. 12, 1985; Brazelton, 1983; Farel & Dobelstein, 1982).

Supervised quality child care at the business or institutional site would make it possible for parents to be closer to and more a part of, the child's day when necessary or appropriate. An infant could easily be breast fed by the mother, because of the convenience of location or a parent could attend a preschool program or conference with little loss of work time (Bodin & Mitelman, 1983).

Disability leave for illness or crisis in the family would enable families to make it through difficult times more easily (Brazelton, 1983; Farel & Dobelstein, 1982; Hohenshil, Hummel & Maddy-Bernstein, 1980).

Hoffman (1980) reported that schools need to adapt more readily to the schedules of parents. School hours, lunch time policies, meetings and special school performances, the time of parent teacher conferences, and vacation schedules need to be more in harmony with the population of parents that the school serves.

After school programs or services could be set up for children who otherwise would be alone after school until their parents arrive home from work. Googins and Burden (cited in Waterloo Courier, Nov. 12, 1985) found that twenty-five percent of the parents with children aged 6-12 reported that their children cared for themselves at home after school. Parents stated that this "creates a source of anxiety" (p. 6).

Parents can help preserve the quality of family life. They can make efforts to spend quality time with children, cut back on outside commitments, share household tasks, and hire outside help if needed (Boswell, 1981). Gray (1980) stated; "Strong positive associations were found between satisfaction and the strategies of having family members share household tasks, reducing standards within certain roles, and considering personal interest important" (p. 45).

Counselors can support couples as they attempt to make their new lifestyles work for them (Boswell, 1981). They can help women and men evaluate their options and develop strategies for coping with potential conflicts when trying to combine career and family (Gray, 1980; Maples, 1981). Decision-making skills, communication skills, and values clarification skills have been found useful to couples as they adjust to their roles and role-modeling for their children (Boswell, 1981). Attention needs to be drawn to any sex differentiation in teacher behavior, course content, course selection and career counseling, and steps must be taken to lessen the differentiation so that girls and boys can see themselves taking on work roles and family care roles (Hoffman, 1980). Boys as well as girls should be taught homemaking and child care skills (Farel & Dobelstein, 1982).

Maternal employment is a part of modern family life. It is a response to other social changes and is meeting needs of the family that the full-time homemaker role could not do. Children are the greatest natural resource of our nation. To provide the best for our children requires research into and evaluation of, the old methods and the new. Developing ways to help dual-working families to adjust, and to enable them to meet their children's needs, is challenging. The research indicates that there are positive and negative aspects to this new way of living. Schools, social institutions, government, and places of employment all need to adjust. It takes time, education, and effort to change attitudes about what is so basic to each of us--the lifestyle of our families.

References

- Acock, A.C., Barker, D. & Bengston, V.L. (1982). Mother's employment and parent-youth similarity. Journal of Marriage and the Family. May, 441-455.
- Anderson, C.W. (1980). Attachment in daily separations: Reconceptualizing day care and maternal employment issues. Child Development. 51, 242-24.
- Baruch, G.K. & Barnett, R.C. (1981). Father's participation in the care of their preschool children, Sex Roles. 7(10), 1043-1055.
- Beck, J. (1986). Maternity-leave controversy isn't just an issue for women. Des Moines Register. January 19.
- Belsky, J. & Sternberg, L.D. (1978). The effects of day care: A critical review. Child Development. 49, 929-949.
- Bennett, B. & Reardon, R. (1985). Dual-career couples and the psychological adjustment of offspring: A review, The School Counselor. March, 287-295.
- Bodin, J. & Mitelman, B. (1983). Mothers who work: Strategies for coping. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Boswell, J. (1981). The dual-career family: A model for equalitarian family politics, Elementary School Guidance and Counseling. 15, 262-268.
- Booth, A. & Edwards, J.N. (1980). Fathers: the invisible parent, Sex Roles. 6(3), 445-456.

- Brazelton, T.B. (1985). Working and Caring. Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (1981). Marital and family characteristics of labor force (Special Labor Force Report 237). Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor.
- Easterbrooks, M.A. & Goldberg, W.A. (1984). Toddler development in the family: Impact of father involvement and parenting characteristics. Child Development. 55, 740-752.
- Etaugh, C. (1974). Effects of maternal employment on children: A review of recent research, Merrill-Palmer Quarterly. 20(2), 71-98.
- Farel, A.M. (1980). Effects of preferred maternal roles, maternal employment and sociodemographic status on school adjustment and competence. Child Development, 51, 1179-1186.
- Farel, A.M. & Dobelstein, A.W. (1982). Supports and deterrents for mothers working outside the home, Family Relations, 31, 281-286.
- Frailberg, S. (1977). Every child's birthright: In defense of mothering, New York: Basic Books.
- Gold, D. & Andres, D. (1978). Developmental comparisons between 10-year-old children with employed and nonemployed mothers. Child Development, 49, 75-84.

- Gray, C. (1985). Woman's worth: Respect begins at home, Graduate Woman. 79(10), 10.
- Gray, J.D. (1980). Counseling women who want both a profession and a family. The Personnel and Guidance Journal, Sept., 43-45.
- Hall, F.S. & Hall, D.T. (1979). The two career couple. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Hoffman, L.W. (1974). Effects of maternal employment on the child: A review of the research. Developmental Psychologist, 34, 859-865.
- Hoffman, L.W. (1979). Maternal employment: 1979. American Psychologist, 34, 859-865.
- Hoffman, L.W. (1980). The effects of maternal employment on the academic attitudes and performance of school-aged children. School Psychology Review, 9(4), 319-333.
- Hoffman, L.W. & Nye, F.I. (1974). Working mothers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hohenshil, T.H., Hummel, D.L. & Maddy-Berstein, C. (1980). The impact of work patterns upon family development. School Psychology Review, 9:312-18.
- Hunt, J.C. & Kiker, B.F. (1984). Parental time devoted to children in two-and one-wage-earner families. Economics of Education Review, 3(1), 75-83.

- Maples, M.F. (1981). Dual career marriages: Elements for potential success. The Personnel and Guidance Journal, Sept., 19-23.
- Marantz, S.A. & Mansfield, A.F. (1977). Maternal employment and the development of sex-role stereotyping in five to eleven year old girls. Child Development, 48, 668-673.
- Nagera, H. (1975). Day care centers: Red light, green light or amber light. Child and Family, 14, 110-136.
- Norris, G. & Miller, J. (1979). The working mothers complete handbook, New York: A Sunrise Book, E.P. Dutton.
- Olds, S.W. (1978). The working parents survival guide, New York: Bantam Books.
- Price-Bonham, S. & Murphy, D.C. (1980). Dual-career marriages: Implications for the clinician. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, April, 181-188.
- Rallings, E.M. & Nye, F.I. (1979). "Wife-mother employment, family and society". In W. Burr, R. Hill, F. Nye, and I. Reiss (Eds.), Contemporary Theories About the Family, New York: Free Press.
- Scarato, A.M. & Sigall, B.A. (1979). Multiple role women. Counseling Psychologist, 8(1), 26-27.
- Schachter, F.F. (1981). Toddlers with employed mothers. Child Development, 52, 958-964.

- Schubert, J.B., Bradley-Johnson, S. & Nuttal, J. (1980).
Mother-infant communication and maternal employment.
Child Development, 51, 246-249.
- Smith, T. (1970). Foundations of parental influence upon
adolescents: An application of social power theory.
American Sociological Review, 35, 860-873.
- Smith, T. (1981). Adolescent agreement with perceived
maternal and paternal educational goals. Journal of
Marriage and the Family, 43, 85-93.
- Stuckey, F.M., McGhee, P.E. & Bell, N.J. (1982).
Parent-child interaction: The influence of maternal
employment. Developmental Psychology, 18(4), 635-644.
- Vogel, S., Broverman, I., Broverman, D., Clarkson, F. &
Rosenkrantz, P. (1970). Maternal employment and
perception of sex roles among college students.
Developmental Psychology, 3, 384-91.
- Waterloo Courier (1985). Family strain, study: Job-
family conflict main source of depression, Nov. 12,
p. 6.