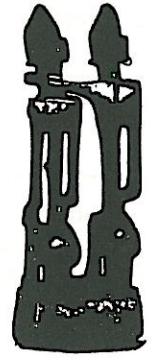

Sex Roles, Population and Development in West Africa



*Policy-Related Studies on Work
and Demographic Issues*

Edited by
Christine Oppong

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Urban Yoruba Mothers

At Home and At Work

Perhaps no other group experiences the problems and potentialities of socio-economic change in West Africa so intensely as do employed, educated urban women. They seek to raise children, earn incomes, and even to derive personal satisfaction from waged and salaried employment in societies marked by social and ecological upheavals, rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, and, lately, severe economic austerity. This chapter attempts to add to our meagre information about this important group by analysing survey data relating to the work and family life of 676 working mothers with pre-school children in Ibadan and Abeokuta. Records of many hours of individual and group discussions are also used: these portray the subjective attitudes and feelings of the women about their situation and their hopes and fears for the future. Finally, policy recommendations are put forward which might improve the lives of women in this pivotal group and those who depend on them.

The specific crisis addressed here results from the decline in the support networks available to parents of young children as a consequence of the employment of adult family members outside the home and the involvement of older children in full-time compulsory education. Because Yoruba women are the traditional and primary care-givers, this strain particularly impinges on mothers, who may ultimately have to choose between taking a job and leaving children under potentially unsatisfactory supervision or caring for them themselves and forgoing income that is critical to family survival or comfort. The cruel choice is often between inadequate child-care and inadequate income—and sometimes women may suffer both. Our focus is on how the women resolve this dilemma.

To study this problem a sample of working Yoruba women with children under six years of age was studied, clustered by workplace and stratified by type of employment as shown in table 7.1. The women interviewed covered the entire span of the female reproductive period, ranging from 16 to 50 years of age. The mean age of the sample was 30.5 years (median 27 years). Most of the women (70 per cent) were relatively young, aged 25–34 years. Nearly all were or had been married but only three-quarters were living with a husband at the time of the study. Seven-

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teen per cent were married but not living with their spouse, and a further 7.1 per cent were either widowed, divorced or separated. The ages at which the women in the sample had married ranged from 11 to 32 years, with the median age at marriage being 23.1 years. Some of the women surveyed thus married relatively late, one-quarter marrying at the age of 25 or later. In this respect, the sample is atypical, probably because so many were in occupations requiring a fairly high level of education. It is not unusual, however, for Yoruba couples to live apart, especially if the marriage is a polygynous one. A husband may live with a young wife, while his older partner, engaging in her own trade or craft, lives in another household.

Only 27 per cent said their husband had more than one wife. Three-quarters came from polygynous homes. Polygyny is more widely practised by Muslims than by Christians. Relatively more of the Abeokuta women were Muslim, married polygynously, and came from polygynous homes themselves.

Roughly two-thirds of the women had three or fewer living children, while 6.4 per cent had six or more, with the ages of the eldest children ranging up to 30 years. The mean number of children per woman was 3.1 and the mean number of children living at home was 3.0. Apart from adult children living elsewhere, 17 per cent of respondents had children away at boarding school, 9 per cent had a child living with a co-wife, and 11 per cent had children living with other relatives. As remarked above, it is part of traditional Yoruba family practice that children sometimes live with grandparents, aunts or uncles or other kin. It is a way of cementing kinship ties, rendering assistance to relatives, and providing children with sound character training. For the child sent from a rural setting to an urban area, or to a more educated home, it is a way of providing him or her with greater opportunities, often the chance to learn more sophisticated ways or to go to school or to be apprenticed in a craft or trade. The educated and the relatively affluent members of a family are those most likely to be called upon to care for the children of other relations. This in part accounts for the fact that over half of the sample said they had children living with them who were not their own.

Table 7.1 Percentage distribution of the workplaces of the women

Workplace	Ibadan	Abeokuta
Government offices	13	9
Para-government offices	4	5
Educational establishments	27	22
Hospitals	6	14
Factories	3	0
Total public sector	54	50
Markets	27	25
Factories	10	15
Banks and insurance offices	8	5
Shops, supermarkets, other businesses	2	6
Total private sector	47	51
TOTAL	101	101
N	470	208

Table 7.2 Percentage distributions of occupations of women and their husbands

Occupation	Women	Their husbands
Farmer	22	1
Trader	22	13
Unskilled	6	1
Semi-skilled	14	7
Clerical and sales	27	19
Skilled	2	10
Semi-professional	15	19
Professional	14	30
Other	—	1
TOTAL	100	101
N	668	609

Occupation

The occupational distribution of the sample is summarised in table 7.2. Just over one quarter of all the women worked in markets, most of them as petty traders. The largest group of manual workers were employed as semi-skilled factory workers (these comprised half of those in the private non-market category); some were engaged in unskilled domestic work, and a number were skilled craftswomen. The largest category of white-collar workers were employed in clerical occupations (including sales). The semi-professional category included women working as primary school teachers. Those involved in secondary and higher education are included in the professional group along with senior nurses, doctors, accountants, and so forth. Women in educational institutions comprised by far the largest group of workers engaged in the modern sector (49 per cent of those in modern sector occupations).

Husbands usually have higher status occupations than their wives but equality tends to increase at the highest levels. Approximately one woman in six had a husband with a lower status occupation, but for the semi-professionals this proportion rose to one in three. Most of their parents were (or had been) engaged in traditional occupations: 71 per cent of their fathers and 92 per cent of their mothers were farmers or traders, mainly on a small scale. Only 12 per cent of their fathers and 3 per cent of their mothers were of semi-professional or professional status.

Only 4 per cent of the women had received no formal schooling. Some 88 per cent were certificate holders of one kind or another (from primary school leaving certificates upwards).

Many of the respondents cherished ambitions for even higher levels of achievement than those they had already attained. Some 42 per cent of them said they were seeking a further educational qualification. Nearly two-thirds of these women aspired to an advanced teaching qualification, a post-secondary technical/commercial/professional qualification, or a university degree. Most of the remainder were seeking either higher secondary qualifications or other secondary or even primary school certificates. These findings suggest a high level of aspiration on the part of many of the women, although the data provide no indication of how realistic their reported aspirations were.

of women and their husbands

Their husbands
1
13
1
7
19
10
19
30
1
101
609

Table 7.3 *Percentage distribution of education of women and their husbands*

Level of education	Women	Their husbands
None	4	6
Primary	24	9
Modern (practical)	25	9
Secondary	24	26
Teacher training	10	12
Technical college	8	12
University	4	26
TOTAL	99	100
N	656	616

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Only 28 per cent were born in the city where they were currently working, and over half of the migrants said that they were born in what they described as a small town or village.

Earnings and Aspirations

The lure of steady, moderate incomes had drawn many women into wage employment in the cities, but many nevertheless looked forward to the day when they would be free to set up their own businesses. They would then be able to please themselves as to hours and types of work, as well as gaining control over the profits of their enterprise and endeavour.

Like women everywhere, they were preoccupied with the high and rising cost of living: all foods, including locally grown produce, had, they claimed, risen tenfold during the 1970s. World Bank (1980) data suggest that prices increased country-wide about fivefold during this period). In addition to expressions of financial anxiety, individual tales of hardship were recorded—of women who were the sole income earners in their households, supporting unemployed husbands as well as children; of working mothers with no one to care for their babies and toddlers. Mothers stressed that it was becoming more and more difficult, at a modest income level, to afford household help. At the same time the higher cost of living made it necessary for mothers to be gainfully employed. A critical factor was the new universal primary education (UPE). As most children went to school, young girls were now only available as housemaids in a part-time capacity. There were still exceptions to be found in 1976, but by 1979 UPE had become both free and compulsory.

Family Relationships

Although men are the socially dominant members of the community, women strive to maintain their economic independence and self-reliance. There is no such thing as sharing incomes unless one of the marriage partners does not have a job. The husbands were largely responsible for paying the rent, providing money for food (including the baby's formula), and paying the children's school fees. The women bought some food and helped to clothe the children. Both wives and husbands had responsibilities in relation to their kin, and some were putting young relatives through secondary school. Few of the husbands gave their wives money to meet their obligations to kin, so wives needed to have their own source of income.

Table 7.4 Occupation level by workplace (in percentages)

Occupation	Workplace				Total
	Market	Factory	Office	Hospital and educational	
Trader	78	—	5	—	21
Unskilled	—	17	—	10	6
Semi-skilled and skilled	22	67	1	5	16
Clerical and sales	—	16	79	13	28
Semi-professional and professional	—	—	15	72	29
Total workforce	100	100	100	100	100
N	161	83	169	221	634

Few men helped in the home and it was up to those women who were working to arrange for the care of their children. If Yoruba women have to stay at home because they are unable to find work, they occupy themselves with trading or craft-work in or near the compound. For most of them being 'only a housewife' is virtually equivalent to idleness and therefore disparaged.

Traditionally, patterns of behaviour between spouses are marked by great deference on the part of the young wife towards her husband and all members of his compound. She must kneel down to him and all others who are senior to her. In their presence she must be extremely reserved and modest in behaviour and appearance, and she must be willing to do the heavy work in the compound. It is only with the birth of her first child that the young wife starts to be treated with more respect. Customarily women are helped with household chores by younger relatives, and by their daughters when they reach an age when they can actively help. Thus the burden of care is often eased over the years as more female children are able to assist the mother. And if a younger co-wife joins the compound, she will then be expected to do much of the heavier work. The older the woman, the more help and respect she receives, and this is increased by the number of her children. However, as groups of women pointed out, this has become more of a problem with the initiation of universal primary education and young girls of school age are now less available to help at home. A further problem is that in the rapidly growing cities, a migrant woman may not have relatives around to help after a child is born.

Many women said that if they had their choice, they would call on their own mothers for help after the birth of a child, as this is a period when help is critically needed. Life in the city is therefore more difficult for a woman if she is a migrant with few family members to whom she can turn. This is especially true for the poor who cannot afford domestic help. While working, a woman may thus have to leave her infant at home with a helper (usually a housemaid or younger sister) who would feed the baby and any older children while she is away. Many women were anxious about leaving children with these young and virtually untrained helpers, who may come and go in rapid succession. However they had little choice in the matter, for nurseries and day-care centres are few; those which do exist are privately run and relatively expensive. Many women even had to stop breastfeeding, or continued only intermittently, when they went back to paid employment. While they were away the helpers would give the baby the bottle, and on the mother's return the

Table 7.5 Mean annual earnings and hours worked per day

Workplace	Annual earnings (in naira)	Range (in naira)	Hours per day	Range (in hours)
Market	650	0-2000	9.1	6-12
Factory	1070	500-2000	8.8	8-9
Office	1710	200-4000	8.5	7-9
Hospital and educational	1970	500-4000	7.4	6-8
All workers	1560		8.3	
N	418		634	

breast might be offered as comfort to calm the baby. The women felt a great need for day-care services, established at a reasonable and therefore subsidised cost, and near the mother's workplace. Even the market women felt that their children could benefit from subsidised nursery and day-care facilities.

When asked how many children they would like to have the women in all the groups responded in similar manner, saying, for example, 'As many as God gives me' as 'As many as possible'. Attitudes are changing among younger women, however, especially those with competing work and family responsibilities.

The Women and Their Work

In the cities, as in the villages, are markets where entrepreneurs, mainly women (but a few men), sell products for money or occasionally for items in kind; but whereas in the villages markets may occupy a few hectares and then often only periodically, in Ibadan and Abeokuta the 'markets' are huge, sprawling neighbourhoods of constant activity and elaborate specialisation. In the sense that markets are found in the villages too these institutions are traditional, but the scale and elaborateness of the city markets make them akin more to a modern department store than to a village trading centre. Yet, because the women who work there to a large extent set their own (rather long) hours and may bring their children with them, these workers certainly share many of the characteristics of a traditional labour force.

In the factories, on the other hand, two-thirds of the workers were semi-skilled or fully skilled, yet these women work in a place and under conditions that are not very much under their control. Table 7.5 further shows that these wage earners have incomes substantially higher than those of the market women and tend to work the 8-9 hour day that is nearly universal for factories. While the factory workers do not on average work longer hours than the market women, the latter report an extremely wide range of hours for their workday.

Next up the economic scale are the office employees, who largely describe themselves as clerical and sales workers, along with a few professionals. These wage earners work slightly less than the others, earning 60 per cent more than the factory women and over two and a half times what the market women earn. Yet, just as in the offices of the cities of the more developed world, these workers also have the widest range of earnings, from clerks taking home only a few naira per day to professionals earning salaries nearly comparable to those of their counterparts in the developed world.

stages)

factory	Office	Hospital and educational	Total
—	5	—	21
17	—	10	6
67	1	5	16
16	79	13	28
—	15	72	29
100	100	100	100
83	169	221	634

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Table 7.6 Reasons given for working (percentages)

To contribute to child's maintenance	52
To be able to maintain self and children if something happens to husband	34
To make use of education or training	32
To save money to establish self in trade or business	22
To buy things for self	21
To have an interest outside the home	12
To save for old age	8
To be able to spend money on relatives	7
To pay children's school fees	6

Finally, in the hospitals and educational establishments are found the semi-professional and fully professional workers. Their earnings and working conditions bear little similarity to those of most Nigerians. Their daily hours are least (and for many of the educational workers part-days are the rule) while their earnings are many times those of the workers at the other end of the economic spectrum. These employees are truly modern in a transitional setting.

There is a marked and expected increase in income by skill level. While the market women claim to earn but a few naira per day, the professionals earn often many times this amount while working significantly fewer hours. The economic value of education is powerfully demonstrated. Each additional, or more advanced, certificate means a substantial increase in economic—and certainly social—status. With little or no education a woman cannot expect to support herself and her children without some kind of familial or community assistance, while the women with post-secondary degrees, even in an inflationary economy, can either support themselves alone or at least make quite substantial contributions to their families' total income.

Table 7.6 shows the percentage of women giving each of the pre-coded responses to the question 'What are the reasons why you work?' As expected, financial reasons figured most prominently (accounting for 77 per cent of all the reasons given). Contributing to their children's maintenance and being able to support themselves and their children should they cease to have their husband's support are evidently important considerations for these women.

Significantly, one-fifth of the women said that they worked in order to save money to establish themselves in a trade or business. These were all women in wage employment with relatively low status occupations, who ultimately hoped to achieve self-employed status in the private sector of the economy. This finding suggests that there is a fluidity of employment between the urban office/factory realm and the large urban market. Yet the decline in formal employment opportunities for women during the recent decade of economic contraction has meant that the realisation of such dreams is becoming less attainable.

Although non-financial reasons were given less frequently, the desire to make use of education or training was cited by one-third of the respondents as a reason for working. Indeed, 80 per cent cited at least one non-financial reason. This suggests that the majority of urban Yoruba working women view their jobs as more than an income-generating activity. The reasons given for working and for choosing a particular job vary between occupational categories and between employment sectors. High status workers (skilled and above) are more likely to

Table 7.7 Percentage of workers expressing job dissatisfaction by workplace

Workplace	%
Market	15
Factory	19
Private office	20
Public office	16
Hospital and education	12
Total sample	15
(N)	(575)
Chi-square = 3.10	

give non-financial reasons for working as their first response than are low-status workers.

Since women increasingly experience great difficulty in securing assistance with child-care and other domestic responsibilities, they are often perceived by employers as likely to be less than full-time workers (even though there is no evidence to support this view).

Job Status and Satisfaction

The majority of the wage-earning, as opposed to self-employed, workers believed that women were fairly treated at work in terms of recruitment (71 per cent felt their employer was fair in this area), promotion (a somewhat smaller 58 per cent), and annual leave (67 per cent). Yet 30–40 per cent did have reservations about whether they or other women were treated the same as their male colleagues.

The majority of women in all occupations claimed to be contented with their work (see table 7.7). The dissatisfied 15 per cent earned on average about 20 per cent less than the majority and tended to be concentrated in the middle range of the education spectrum and among those in formal types of employment it was those in the intermediate grade levels who were most likely to be dissatisfied with their status.

Job satisfaction also varies according to the perceived or desired alternatives to the present job. Some respondents aspired to higher status jobs, but by far the most commonly preferred alternative was engaging in trade or one's own business, cited by 73 per cent of the women. Only 13 per cent of the women would have opted for the role of housewife, while a few (5 per cent) would have liked to be full-time students; it was among this last group that job satisfaction was relatively lowest. Indeed 42 per cent said that they were seeking further qualifications.

In addition to their work outside the home, women have to cope with manifold domestic responsibilities. Although the following section deals specifically with the woman's role as mother, it is appropriate to ask here how the problems of reconciling and co-ordinating work and maternal roles influence the women's job satisfaction. First, the welfare and feelings of other members of their families are of critical importance. Because so few of the husbands disapproved of their working (only 4 per cent reported such problems) it is clear that they encountered little explicit resistance from their mates. Yet the number of children a woman has does appear to affect her job satisfaction: the women with one child tended to be slightly less satisfied with their jobs, probably because many of them would prefer to devote more

of their time to the exciting process of raising a first child. In this regard it is particularly significant that *all* of the women who reported having been able to breastfeed their last baby for a year or more said they were satisfied with their jobs. The degree of satisfaction with their child-care arrangements also affects the women's job satisfaction: among those with relatives looking after their children, the rate of dissatisfaction was 50 per cent higher.

To balance the focus on job satisfaction, we also asked the women whether they were satisfied with the care their children received. It is significant that over a quarter (27 per cent) of the women said they felt dissatisfied, and it is clear that job satisfaction and difficulties in finding satisfactory child-care arrangements, both together and separately, may influence these feelings. Among the women who were not satisfied with their jobs, for example, over a third (35 per cent) were also not satisfied with their child-care arrangements, and there was a similar proportion among those women who reported that holding a job had caused them 'problems in organising [their] child-care and household activities'. Among the small group of women who were dissatisfied with their jobs and experiencing organisational problems, 44 per cent reported dissatisfaction with their child-care arrangements. Finally, as we would expect, money tends to influence the perception of these problems: the mean annual earnings of the women who were satisfied with their child-care were 12 per cent higher than those who were not satisfied (N1610 as against N1440), and among the office and clerical workers the difference was a substantial 40 per cent.

The middle level urban worker thus appears to experience the greatest difficulty both in finding job satisfaction and in making adequate child-care arrangements. The market traders and casual workers often take one or more of their children with them to the workplace, while the high-status, more affluent women can purchase acceptable child-care services, but for those women who work relatively long, inflexible and unremunerative hours in factories and offices, job satisfaction and adequate child-care arrangements are both harder to find.

Occupational and Familial Conflicts: The Role of Mother

All the women interviewed in the survey were parents who had at least one child under the age of six. All therefore had domestic commitments, and three-quarters of them were living with their husband at the time of the study. A natural question arises: to what extent did their roles as workers outside the home impinge upon and conflict with their roles at home as mothers and wives? It was originally hypothesised that some of the women surveyed would experience problems of role conflict in attempting to combine their economic and domestic, especially maternal, responsibilities, but that women working in the markets would be less likely to experience such problems than those working in more formal and routinised urban workplaces.

Table 7.8 shows that 27 per cent of the women said their job caused such conflicts. The main issue was the care and supervision of young children, mentioned by 42 per cent of these. The two other major areas of strain concerned help in the house (17 per cent) and the lack of time and rest consequent upon the combination of full-time employment and family responsibilities. As expected, only 13 per cent of the 177 women working in the markets reported problems, compared with 33 per cent of the 480 women employed in clerical and sales and 38 per cent of the professional and semi-professional women—thus supporting the premise that such

a first child. In this regard it is who reported having been able to they were satisfied with their jobs. e arrangements also affects the tives looking after their children,

r. so asked the women whether they ived. It is significant that over a dissatisfied, and it is clear that job ry child-care arrangements, both ngs. Among the women who were a third (35 per cent) were also not d there was a similar proportion job had caused them 'problems in ities'. Among the small group of and experiencing organisational ith their child-care arrangements. nfluence the perception of these en who were satisfied with their who were not satisfied (N1610 as ical workers the difference was a

o experience the greatest difficulty dequate child-care arrangements. ke one or more of their children is, more affluent women can pur- ose women who work relatively ories and offices, job satisfaction harder to find.

The Role of Mother

arents who had at least one child commitments, and three-quarters e of the study. A natural question tside the home impinge upon and wives? It was originally hypothe- rience problems of role conflict d domestic, especially maternal, e markets would be less likely to ore formal and routinised urban

n said their job caused such con- a of young children, mentioned by s of strain concerned help in the consequent upon the combination ties. As expected, only 13 per cent d problems, compared with 33 per nd sales and 38 per cent of the s supporting the premise that such

Table 7.8 Percentage of women reporting that their job causes domestic organisational problems

Job classification	%
Trader	13
Unskilled	28
Semi-skilled and skilled	19
Clerical and sales	33
Semi-professional and professional	38
Total sample	27
(N)	(647)

Table 7.9 Percentage of women satisfied with child-care arrangements

Child-care arrangement	Percentage using this arrangement	Percentage satisfied
Child's grandmother	31	91
Goes with mother to work	12	81
Other relation	11	78
Housemaid or baby nurse	35	69
Neighbour, friend, other	11	56
Total sample	100	77
(N)	(553)	

problems are related to the nature of employment.

As already mentioned, the most commonly cited problem here was making satisfactory arrangements for child-care while the mother was at work. Although most women were satisfied with their arrangements, 27 per cent were not. Among those women reporting problems in reconciling work and family life, 36 per cent mentioned dissatisfaction with child-care arrangements, whereas only 18 per cent of women not reporting problems mentioned such dissatisfaction.

Table 7.9 shows the extent to which mothers were satisfied with the various types of child-care arrangements. The women with the highest incidence of satisfaction were those leaving their children with their own or their husband's mother. Relying on other family members seemed to be less satisfactory. Nor is a baby nurse necessarily the solution. Complaints of barely adequate or unsatisfactory care were legion amongst employers of this type of untrained assistance. The findings also suggest that neighbours and friends do not constitute a popular or satisfactory form of substitute care.

Clearly, then, in relying on a variety of arrangements, mothers are attempting to solve the problem of substitute child-care, but they are not necessarily doing so to their satisfaction. It would seem that the lack of alternatives accounts for the fact that some mothers continue with methods of care which cause them anxiety and distress. In adopting these varied and sometimes unsatisfactory solutions, the women in this study have much in common with working women in other industrialised countries, who must devise child-care arrangements from a range of

feasible, affordable, and not always satisfactory systems. What is different about the Nigerian women, however, is the extent to which they make use of older relatives for this purpose, especially grandmothers. This is a traditional pattern, but as urbanisation leads to the separation of kin, working women—especially those in the formal sector—will face greater difficulties in securing happy, let alone enriching, environments for their children.

The women devote a substantial amount of their waking lives to their occupations, an average of 8.5 hours per day, with 51 per cent working five days per week, 39 per cent working six days, and 1 per cent working seven days. It was noted above that some of the women commented on the lack of time available to them. When asked what they did in their leisure (non-work) time the most common activities, in order of importance, were sleeping or resting, spending time with children, and housework.

Only 38 per cent of the women were able to devote their remaining energies to purely personal leisure activities, such as reading, hobbies, or social or community activities. This is often the experience of mothers in industrialised countries where the combined demands of work and domestic and family responsibilities entail constant rush and fatigue. The women in the present study appeared to be highly committed to their occupational role, and the majority of them spent a great deal of time in work related activities. Almost all the women were full-time workers, probably because of the lack of availability of part-time work. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that most of the rest of their time was spent on their families.

Time is thus likely to be a highly valued commodity, particularly when work and family roles are quite separate. When there is an opportunity to work and care for children simultaneously, the problems are perhaps less likely to arise. Significantly, satisfaction with child-care arrangements seemed to be more widespread amongst those who spent long hours with their children: 84 per cent of those spending 12 or more hours per day with their children were satisfied with their children's care, compared with 73 per cent of those spending less than 12 hours per day with them. Furthermore, the findings indicate that satisfaction with child-care is more widespread amongst market women: only 13 per cent were dissatisfied with the arrangements for their children, compared with 19–38 per cent of those in the other types of workplace.

The link is not so much between the employment sector and length of time spent with children, however, as between employment sector and type of child-care arrangement made. While women in the markets frequently care for their own children, women in the modern sector make greater use not only of grandmothers but also of housemaids and baby nurses. This last type of arrangement is often considered unsatisfactory.

All of the women contributed financially toward the upkeep of their families. Over one-third said they contributed towards food, medical expenses, children's school fees and clothes, wages of household help, and leisure activities. Fathers appeared to bear a major share of domestic financial responsibilities, especially rent. For no item did more than half the women report that they were the sole provider. A wide range of items were shared obligations. Women's responsibilities tended to be either more child-centred or, as in the case of leisure, more elastic expenditures.

Women continue to bear responsibility for work in the home and the smooth running of the household, including responsibility for hiring and firing household help. (This was the one area in which less than half reported joint decision-making

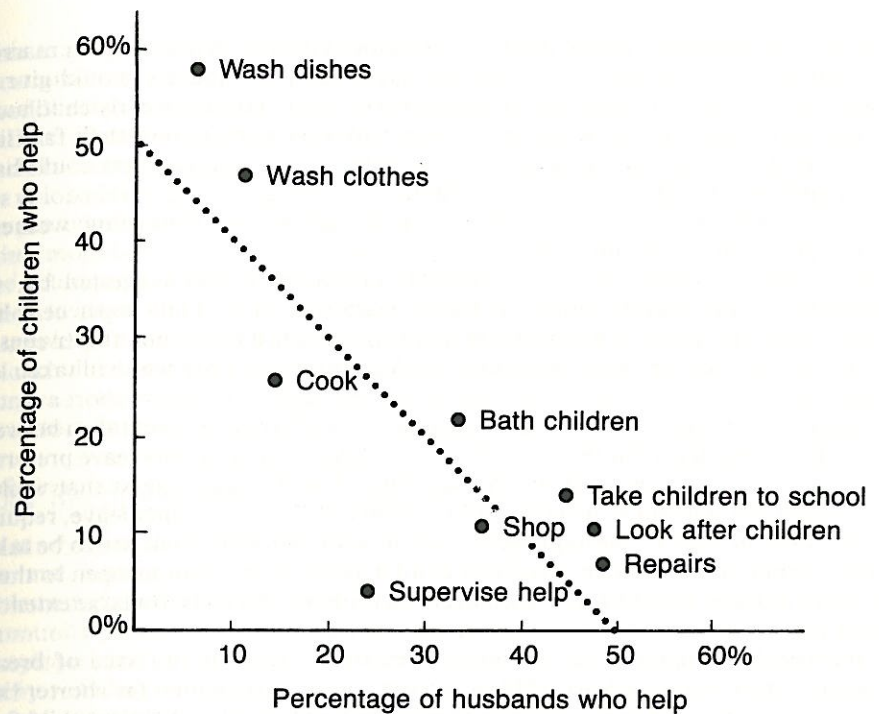


Figure 7.1: Percentage of women reporting assistance from other family members

with their husbands and for which 35 per cent said they made the decision alone.) With regard to having children, children's education and discipline, gifts to relatives, and financial decision-making in the home, decision-making was reported to be a joint process in six or seven cases out of every ten.

In the absence of paid household help, women can only look to members of their own family for assistance with domestic chores and family affairs. Women were asked to what extent, if any, they received help from their husband or children. Only 25 per cent of husbands did not take part in domestic work at all. As figure 7.1 shows, the supervision of household help was largely the mother's responsibility: 25 per cent of the husbands assisted in this area and only 4 per cent of the older children did so. About half got help from other household members, and to some extent the older children and husbands acted as substitutes (note the negative trend of the points). Apart from household repairs, the most favoured areas for participation by husbands included looking after the children, taking them to school, and doing the shopping. Those tasks regarded as more menial and less 'masculine', such as washing clothes and dishes or cooking food, were correspondingly less popular among husbands, but older children did help.

Many women are thus constrained to spend their leisure time doing housework, caring for their children, or simply sleeping after their chores are finished and many spoke of the need for some kind of household help. One third of the suggestions for improving child-care facilities involved having a helper in the home. Other possible solutions focused on the extension and improvement of child-care

facilities, as well as the improvement of conditions of work (especially for married women workers). Twenty-seven per cent suggested that mothers should give up their jobs so that they could remain at home with their children in early childhood. A few also suggested giving men more money to help them support their families. In the face of financial stringency, it is difficult to see how mothers could have genuine freedom of choice with regard to staying at home, especially if in doing so a woman would be acting contrary to traditional mores concerning women's participation in the labour force.

However, the need for a more flexible approach is also suggested by, for example, women's preferences for longer maternity leave. Only 8 per cent had taken maternity leave of 6 months or more for their last baby, but 18 per cent of them said they would like to have done so. A substantial 46 per cent had taken less than 3 months off work, although only 30 per cent said they liked so short a maternity leave. As these figures indicate, many women (45 per cent) had taken between 3 and 6 months' leave for their last child, the duration of maternity leave preferred by a majority of all respondents (52 per cent). The findings suggest that while a substantial proportion of women prefer a relatively short maternity leave, requirements vary, and a flexible approach is called for if different needs are to be taken into account. What women actually do will depend on the options open to them. With regard to maternity leave, their decision probably depends to a large extent on what provisions are made for them by employers.

Inextricably related to the problem of maternity leave is the issue of breast-feeding. Most women breastfed their infants for periods of time far shorter than has traditionally been the case. Only 15 per cent had breastfed their last child for 6 months or more, and 39 per cent had breastfed for less than 3 months. A variety of reasons were given for the cessation of breastfeeding, including ill-health, insufficient milk, and so forth. But the most common reasons concerned work and personal choice. Some 36 per cent of the women felt they had breastfed for long enough and 25 per cent had stopped because of their work. These findings reflect a change in attitudes towards breastfeeding as well as the changing demands and nature of female labour force participation.

By and large, suggestions for change and improvement were modest and couched in terms of existing patterns of provision. With child-care arrangements, flexibility again seems to be a key element in the women's proposals. Twenty-nine per cent thus suggested shorter working hours or more part-time jobs to enable women to spend more time at home with young children. Another 23 per cent thought some form of financial assistance could make for improved care, and 14 per cent suggested the provision of nursery schools. As reported above, the most popular proposal (given by 33 per cent of women) was to have a helper in the home. The concern with improving household arrangements is further revealed by mothers' preferences regarding child-care: some 21 per cent mentioned a baby nurse or housemaid, while 29 per cent said they would prefer a relative. However, 43 per cent would ideally opt for a nursery or day-care centre with trained personnel.

Indeed, the majority of women (85 per cent) said they would make use of such a facility, provided charges were reasonable. More than half of those who thought they would not make use of a nursery said they already had a preferable alternative (most frequently, their own mother). Others felt it would be too expensive for them, or believed nurseries did not look after children well, and that they themselves could take better care of their children). Many women were in favour of

an urban phenomenon, fostering of rural development may provide a powerful break to urban migration. Nearly three-quarters of the women in the present study were migrants, over half of whom said they had been born in a 'small town' or village. Were such women and their families, particularly the less advantaged (who generally wish to move), encouraged to remain in their home town or village, the problems of child-care which confound mothers in the urban areas might be avoided, or ameliorated, in so far as the wider network of kin could be called upon for help in the home setting. Promotion of rural development and rural industrialisation and other positive inducements (in the way of services, for example) to counteract the lure of the towns would help family members remain together.

No matter how good the conditions at work, it appears that Yoruba women prefer to be self-employed and independent, as they have been for so many generations. They frequently express the wish to support and educate their children on the proceeds of their own trading or business enterprises. Thus, many women in the wage earning sector later opt for self-employment. In so doing, they may be more fulfilled both as mothers and as independent individuals with ambitions for personal achievement and more able to avoid the strains and role conflicts of employed mothers working away from home.