

THE INFLUENCE OF HOUSEHELPS ON CHILD BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

Ideally, children are brought up well when both wife and husband give substantial attention to their children. However, due to the increase in economic demands, in major cities and growing towns in the world, there is an increasing number of couples both in paid employment. This makes the couples to leave their homes before children wake up and return to the homes when children are actually retiring to bed. This increasing trend in both couples working has led to children being raised by care-takers or house-helps. This phenomena is raising a concern, as one wonders, do the house-helps possess the spiritual values that need to be imparted on children? Is the phenomenon of raising children through care-takers the best model? What can be done so that children, from working couples, are raised in a holistic manner? This article explores ways that can help bring up a child in a holistic way faced with challenges of work. The research used exploratory qualitative design targeting working couples. The findings were that house-helps need training for proper child-upbringing and that couples need to be available for their children. The implication of the research is that policy makers need to design appropriate programs in building capacity for house-helps, policies for conducive work environment for raising children and programs that would help families to balance work and family.

Key words: *child development, working couples, house-helps, work-family balance*

Introduction

Not too many years ago, in the typical African family, only the father worked outside the home. As Teghtsoonian (1997) puts it, there was an ideology structured around the two roles of bread-winning husband and economically dependent full-time wife and mother. Further-more there was a belief that full-time mother-care was the best way to ensure children's psycho-social well-being and that out-of-home care endangered it. This meant that

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one parent remained home to take care of children. In addition to this, taking care of children was looked at as a community responsibility. The extended family played a crucial role in taking care of children hence imparting values on them. Children want nurturing people who spend time with them, provide happy, stimulating learning environments, make them feel warm, wanted and welcome, and help them when they are unhappy or need attention (Calvert, 2003).

However, today society is facing a double edged sword which raises a concern as regards to rearing children. There is a growing phenomenon of both parents working away from the home, leaving little time to rearing children. Working parents have to get their feet in two camps, that of work (whether it is house-work or office-work) and that of home and family (Benton, 2015). This requires a balancing act. According to Hochschild (1997) a growing number of parents face a time bind: the more time they spend at work, the more hectic home becomes, and the more they want to escape back to work. Hochschild further states that eventually, work becomes their home, and home becomes work. Over 50% of all employees report that job demands interfere with their personal responsibilities, while 43% of employees say that their family responsibilities interfere with their work performance. While managing a career and family leaves some parents feeling guilty and frazzled, others seem to be able to effortlessly balance parenthood with full-time work (Work-family balance, 2015).

Decreasing role of the extended family

There is an emerging lifestyle where individualism is increasing the chasm between the nuclear and extended family, which in the olden days acted as a safety net to raise children. The emerging phenomenon of old age homes means that the extended family - which in older days played a critical role in child rearing - is becoming obsolete. In addition to this, growing individualism has led the family to face some challenges in parenting. The

ability to devote enough time to both can be, for many parents, an overwhelming challenge to overcome. Most families have resorted to alternative ways of child caring.

The two phenomena have led to a number of child rearing methods. Some of the modalities are: resigning from work completely, unpaid leave, paid holiday leave, paid carer's leave, flexible working hours and informal arrangements. However, a number of families find it difficult between choosing money and how to care for children. Such families have resorted to employing house helps to take care of children. As noted in the hypothetical story from the Lenten campaign of week three on Family and Social Morality (Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015) parents eventually are unable to notice the deteriorating situation of their children. The story is paraphrased here below:

A wealthy family of husband, wife and two children - a boy and a girl - operated many large shops, rental flats and buses. Due to the nature of their business, the parents often left the children at the care of servants. As time went by, the boy started using drugs and was ultimately recruited into an outlawed gang and finally tested HIV positive. The girl moved from one entertainment joint to the other, spent nights away from home and engaged in promiscuous activities and finally died while procuring an abortion. However, since the parents were busy, they were not able to notice the deteriorating behaviour. The parents started blaming each other for the children's problems.

In reality, Soko and Katuse (2014) observe that there is a growing trend of middle class families in major cities and growing towns in the world. However, due to the increase in economic demands, in major cities and growing towns in the world, there is an increasing number of couples both in paid employment. Churu (2014) asserts that the pursuit of wealth compromises the time spent with the family, most parents rise at 4:00 a.m. and begin a race with time that will not end until 9:00 p.m. This makes couples leaving home before children

wake up and return when children are retiring to bed. Faced by this situation, couples are confronted by challenges in pursuit of raising their children at the same time providing them with basic needs as discussed in the following section.

Resignation

The extreme choice would be resigning from work to take care of the children. A number of theories support that children learn by their interaction with the environment. The best persons to interact with are the parents. The psychosocial development of a child is influenced through interactions with family, friends and culture. Arnold Gessell (1880-1961), a proponent of maturation theory, identified the role of nurture and nature in child development. While 'resignation from work' would be the most appropriate method of raising children, this compromises on the financial component and the issue of gender. Questions that are raised are: who must resign and look after children? if it is the woman who has the better paying job, should she resign and the husband raise the child? Can a man make such a decision to leave work and be a parent available for the family?

Choice not to have children

Some couples may choose not to have children because children are becoming a 'burden' to raise. Such a decision is noticed in the developed world where birth rates are low. Yew (2015) and United Nations-Population Division (2006) state that the replacement rate² for developed countries is 2.1, yet nearly half the world's population has birth rates lower than that. The USA has a rate of 2.0, Germany: 1.4, Holland: 1.8, Spain: 1.4; Italy: 1.4, Sweden 1.9, Ireland and U.K. 2.1 and 1.9 respectively.

²Replacement-level fertility: Total fertility levels of about 2.1 children per woman. This value represents the average number of children a woman would need to have to reproduce herself by bearing a daughter who survives to childbearing age. If replacement level fertility is sustained over a sufficiently long period, each generation will exactly replace itself in the absence of migration (United Nations, Population Division, 2006).

In order to prevent the declining reproduction rate, the government of Singapore has - instituted a wide array of measures to encourage families to have children. Such measures are: improved accessibility to quality child care, leave entitlements for new mothers and parents of young children, and financial incentives to help defray the costs of raising children (Yew, 2015). This has its own challenges as noticed by those countries practicing it. The imbalance leads to lack of labour power and hence reliance on countries that have larger populations.

Working arrangements

Working arrangements take various forms. To begin with, there are those stipulated by the legal framework in a number of countries. Such are in forms of paternity and maternity leave. However, these are short term in nature. Long term arrangements are: unpaid leave, paid holiday leave, paid carer's leave, flexible working hours, informal arrangements, taking children to work (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005). Working arrangements such as part-time work, flexible hours and paid carers leave may help parents juggle paid work and family responsibilities. However, such options do not seem viable in a developing country where the cost of living is high, hence the need for couples to complement each other in providing for the family. As noted all these options come with their challenges. They compromise on the income and couples are at the mercy of the policies stipulated by the employer.

House-helps

The Google search engine for the word 'house-helps' yields 160,000,000 results. Striking enough is that the first results are about Kenyan locations such as Kawangware, and agents that provide house-helps. Indeed use of house-helps and relatives is the common solution for working couples. Couples employ house helps or invite a relative to take care of

children and carry out domestic chores while couples are away from the home. In most cases, couples think that any house help, with a few instructions, can manage the home and take care of children. Indeed a considerable number of house-helps do their jobs well; yet, the majority may do the chores well but neglect the child nurturing. A number of cases may prove this. In Uganda, a family placed a CCTV camera to film the home while away; it recorded a video of a house help physically abusing a child. The video went viral (House-help beat child, 2015). There are cases of children locked in houses while the house helps disappear; and cases where house helps 'steal' children or collude with kidnappers who ask for ransom to release the children. There have been cases where children watch the same videos (adult content) that their caretakers watch. In spite of this, house-help use is the most preferred form of child rearing by many working families. Therefore, it is important to ask the questions that lead to the above hitches. Why would house-helps do such inhuman acts? A number of factors that can lead to this are: (1) house-helps are often not well-formed themselves (2) house helps sometimes suffer mistreatment by the couple and take their anger out on the child in the absence of the parent (3) when children start growing up they start despising house-helps thinking they are mere servants.

Method and Procedure of Data Collection

The researcher used qualitative research design. Qualitative research emphasizes on the qualities of entities and on the process and ways that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Creswell, 2009). This research used exploratory and descriptive designs which according to Burns & Burns (2010) is used when a study is vague hence the goal is to improve the final research design by becoming familiar with the basic facts and concerns, developing a picture of what is occurring and determining the feasibility and sense of direction for rigorous follow-up.

The researcher used two forums to collect data namely Small Christian Communities and Facebook. The choice of Facebook was ideal because this is a forum used by most families to share on social and spiritual issues. Small Christian Communities were also good because it acted as a focus group where members shared their experiences in working couples. The number of respondents was 25 families in the small Christian communities and 7 respondents from facebook and one respondent chose to write his responses through email.

The 25 families comprised of husband and wife except 4 who didn't have their partners during the focus group discussion. Therefore the actual number represented by the small Christian community was 46. There particulars of the respondents is as presented below.

Table 1.1 Description of Participants

Participant	Gender	Occupation and exposure
FGD	Mixture – all married	Employed: Multiple locations Most of these are middle and upper class
P1	Male: not married	Employed: Canada, South Africa and Kenya exposure
P2	Female	Employed: Kenya
P3	Male: not married	Employed: Kenya
P4	Female	Employed: Kenya
P5	Male	Kenya, UK and Sweden
P6	Male – not married	Employed: Kenya
P7	Female – not married	Employed: Kenya
P8	Female – not married	Employed: Initially a house-help in Kenya

The participants in both forums were asked the following questions based on the hypothetical story which appeared in week three of the Lenten campaign (Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015). To those in Small Christian Communities the full version was read while for those on facebook, the story was summarized. The following was the summary:

There is an assumption that working couples leave home early and come home late. They spend very minimal time with their children, hence their children are left in the hands of caretakers.

Research questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways does the situation in the hypothetical case (children being left without care as a result of ‘being busy’ at work) happen in your society?
2. Would you leave your job in order to raise a child?
3. How do working couples raise their children in the community where you live?
4. Who should impart values on children?
5. What can be done about the situation?

Results

Whether the hypothetical case is a reality in the communities

From the focus group discussion (FGD) it was strongly felt that the reality is that the growing population is indeed having both couples working. This concurs with Soko and Katuse (2014) who observe that there is a middle class growth in growing towns and cities. On the same note Benton (2015) states that working parents have to get their feet in two camps, that of work (whether it is house-work or office-work) and that of home and family. The trend therefore leads couples to leave early in the morning and arrive late in the evening.

As one respondent pointed out, '*couples leave early and come home late*' (P5; FGD).

Respondent P6 stated that homes are manned by the house-helpers and watchman, 'our children are nurtured by these two people that they see most often. It is therefore imperative to have people with high morality and integrity to be near our children as the house-help and watchmen. Our children get values from house-helpers' (P5). Most families have challenges of taking care of children (FGD).

Would you leave your job in order to raise a child?

As to whether they would rather resign their jobs than taking care of their children, it was strongly felt that both, children and job were important. As one respondent commented "*what do I feed my children on when I resign or take unpaid leave? Moreover, how sure am I that I will get back my job if I ask for leave?*" (P.1). The respondents both from the interviews and FGD strongly pointed out that having children is a very important component not to be compromised with work. As participant P2 pointed out '*I work for my children...I do not think work will have meaning without my children*'.

How do working couples raise their children in the community where you live?

Regarding raising children a number of ways were pointed out such as use of house-helpers, use of relatives, bringing children to day-care, bringing children to boarding schools even if they are very young, bringing children to friends who do not work. However, the most common way of raising children that was mostly pointed out was the use of house-helpers. Most of the respondents mentioned that couples use of house-helpers to take care of their children. A minority mentioned that they live with their relatives who assume the role of taking care of children. Those that mentioned this said they ask their parents to live with their grandchildren. Some respondents also stated that they use a mixture of the methods.

One respondent (P2) stated that she tries as much as possible to be with the children. 'I am a very busy mom but for as long as I am not travelling, I wake up to prepare breakfast at 4.00 a.m. I wake up my daughter at 5 a.m. then help her get ready for school, sit and have breakfast with her before she is picked up at 6 a.m. Previously, I would drop her to school en-route to my office (to have more quality time with her) but she now prefers to go with a private van that picks her and drops her at our gate. I also make sure that homework is checked and signed too each evening.'

Who should be imparting values on children?

On who should impart values on the children, one respondent stated that family should come first because for a child to grow in the ways that are right and never to depart from them when they grow up, it all starts from the family (P3). This is supported by the theory of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky that child development is influenced through interactions with family which is nurture. Another respondent (P4) stated that the first five years of a child's development are very central to cognitive development, moral formation as well as affective intelligence/ formation. All these depend on the operational environment of existence for the child. The child's only known environment at this time is largely formed by the parents as well as those that form the household. He further stated that according to cognitive behaviorists, the child is born without values but acquire these values from the environment of operation and existence. Working parents deny their children of all round growth with emphasis on moral formation. It is equally necessary to point out that children learn by coping, observation, reinforcement, rewarding, affirmation, appreciation, punishment, self-success, and above all competition. The question is how much does a child tap all this from parents?

From the FGD it was stated that values are imparted from the home front first, even before the child starts school. The Church also helps in reinforcing values (FGD; P7; P8; P1; P9). Respondents stressed that early stages are critical and values need to be imparted gradually. It is difficult to say that you would impart the values when children grow up. This confirms with a proverb of one of the Malawian tribes which says '*Kuongola mtengo mpoiyamba*' meaning, if you want to straighten a tree you need to do it at the early stage.

One respondent (P8) and the FGD underscored that a number of children lost touch with their primary agent of socialization, the family. Such children, to her observation, seem not to have acquired good values. Another respondent stated that moral formation is critical. It is even worrying if a househelp is from a different kind of faith.

P9 stated that she became a househelp in order to raise school fees to go to college. She felt comfortable with the man employer but not with the lady, who kept piling up chores for her. She stated that she was saved by her spirituality 'not to revenge or avenge'. As she noted "why should I victimize the innocent children...after all I had become fond of them...they were my source of happiness. I chose to be committed to my job especially bringing children to school to the extent that the teachers thought the children were my own".

On how to improve imparting the values, one respondent (P4) stated that it is key to discuss the importance of good values in the family. She called for open communication between parents, children and house-helps. She further stated that elders in the family should lead by examples. She stressed that couples need to teach children and house-helps the values that the couples want children and house-helps to learn through your own actions. Among those values mentioned were self-discipline, kindness, compassion and social responsibility. From the FGD it was pointed out that children cannot be raised by house-help or caretakers alone, couples need to make an effort and create time for their children. This view was also echoed by nearly all the participants.

Recommendations

As regards what could be done, a number of recommendations are proposed. All of them point to two most important things, “that parents need to be available for their children and that there is need to create a conducive environment for holistic child development by strengthening the working relationships between couples and their house helps”. This is in view of the fact that house-help usage is a common way of raising children by working parents. However, to achieve this there is need to carry out the following:

- a) **Capacity building for house-helps:** There is need to train house-helps of working families on various life skills relating to children. As some of the respondents pointed out, house-helps need to be carefully selected and guided. The major issues to look at could include the following: How children can protect themselves from abuse; how house helps can keep the home safe, and First Aid skills.
- b) **Awareness on child protection:** There is need to create awareness on child protection strategies. The idea is to maximise on areas that could be create a safe environment for children as well as positive discipline. This includes vetting house-helps before they are offered employment.
- c) **Values for children:** There is need to discuss and create consciousness on values related to child upbringing. Such values could include religious values (spirituality), social and cultural values and morality.
- d) **Work-family balance:** Couples need to be conscientized on work-family balance stressing setting time for work and family. On the same note employees need to come up with ways on how company policies can be more friendly to child upbringing.
- e) **Motivation for house-helps:** There is need to enhance house-help motivation and working relations. Issues to consider are: promoting proper communication,

understanding personalities/temperaments, clarifying expectations of couples from house helps as well as the expectations of house helps from employers.

- f) **Replenishing Spirituality together:** The saying that goes ‘a family that prays together lives together’ is important to every family. First is the family responsibility to do the balancing act. A family need to replenish the religious spirituality. There is no religious person who can go on an empty tank without re-fuelling (spiritual food) this analogy is for the good of the family. People are left with limited time for their families (P1). Families need to have common meetings for growth.
- g) **Walking the talk:** Those that interact with children in the house need to be exemplary. Children should not see contradictions between what we want to be done and what we do as adults.

Uniqueness of these proposals to the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church programs focus mostly on youth, couples through marriage encounter while as there is little or no attention on ‘raising children’ by working couples. Therefore, the recommendations focus on the working couples and the ‘house-helps’. In particular on those that take care of the children while the couples are away. It is envisaged that if this is addressed, owing to the fact that it is a commonly used mode of raising children, children will be brought up in a more holistic manner. However, it does not mean that the couples are relieved from taking care of their children; they are supposed to create as much time as possible for their children. Again, it is envisaged that the Catholic Church can influence, through its structures, policy makers on work policies by employers to enable couples to have ample time for their children.

Conclusion

The research explored the issue of holistic upbringing of children in the modern era. It was clear that there is a growing trend of working couples making it difficult for them to

attend to their jobs and that of taking care of children, a situation that has resulted to use of house-helpers to take care of children. The researcher had a concern as to whether house-helpers are empowered enough to raise children in a holistic manner. The findings and recommendations pointed out the need for work-balance so that couples become available for their children and training for house-helpers so that they bring up children in a holistic way. Further research is proposed on whether house-helpers employed are single or married with children. Should those who are married be employed, how would this state affect their employment as house-helpers? Further-more there is need to carry out a quantitative research to test the conceptual framework.

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