

# Children in a world of changing maternal occupational patterns: the Nigerian experience

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*Childhood 1994: 2: 145-151.* © Munksgaard, 1994

Socialization processes in Nigeria as far as women's occupational patterns are concerned were largely restricted to the home, however, recently there has been a gradual shift. More women are attracted to traditional and non-traditional occupations usually offering a better package of income, conditions of service, etc. This paper investigates the relationships between maternal employment status (MES) and Nigerian children's perceived feeling of maternal warmth in three main ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and its attendant effect on their personality and behavioural dispositions. Nine hundred children with ages ranging between 12 and 14 years constituted the randomly selected sample. T-test analysis results revealed a significant relationship between MES and maternal warmth. A significant relationship was also observed between MES and the personality/behavioural dispositions of Nigerian children. The implications of these findings are discussed. Recommendations are made for reducing emotional and psychological risks while improving available gains.

## Background information

In traditional Nigerian Society, women play a major role in the upbringing of children and, hence, are considered by society as the first providers of psychological warmth, security, shelter, food, clothing and guidance. Even though there are more than 250 different ethnic groupings in Nigeria, nearly all have proverbs that reflect the exalted position of the mother. The Yoruba, for example, have a saying that the mother is the main stay of the home.

Women have, thus, tended to occupations that enable fulfillment as wives and mothers. This has ensured a family where children enjoyed the security, comfort, love, warmth, acceptance which form the bedrock of the rights meant to be guaranteed under the United Nations declaration of November, 20 1959. The principles here are:

- (i) the right to a healthy, intellectual and physical development;
- (ii) the right to protection against cruelty, neglect and exploitation;

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Key words: family; socialization; maternal employment.

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(iii) the right to love, understanding and care.

Since in the Nigerian cultural context the mother-child relationship is the essential unit in the home, the nature of this relationship will go a long way to determine the extent to which these principles are met in the children's lives.

However, as in most cultures, many such factors as increased employment opportunities, access to education, involvement of mothers within communities outside the home, improved educational facilities and access to qualifications leading to female employment have led to a change in women's occupational patterns. More women are moving from home-based to traditional out-door and non-traditional occupations. For example, in 1963, the total number of women in administrative and managerial categories in Nigeria was 72, by 1977 it had increased to over 3,000. Similarly, in technical, scientific and professional categories, the number had increased from 1,627 in 1963 to over 12,000 in 1977; and by 1989 about 50% of the nation's 7,000 lawyers were women. These figures show the increasing trend away from the home. It is important at this point to note that an increasing proportion of these women are involved in non-traditional occupations.

Given the very important child-rearing role of women, it is obvious that these changes are bound to have some consequential effects on mother-child relationships, the essential family factor in Nigeria, and on the total well-being of children. This may explain why a number of juvenile malpractices have been blamed on ineffective and inefficient maternal care, and one of the possible reasons attributed to this is mothers now having dual roles.

This paper focuses on the effect of this trend and its effects on mother-child relationships as perceived by the child. There is a paucity of literature on Nigerian maternal occupational roles and its consequences.

## Objectives

The concern of this study was to find if any relationship exists between maternal employment status and children's perceived maternal acceptance/personality-behavioural disposition. Two main hypotheses were generated:

- 1) there is no significant difference between children of mothers in the three selected occupational categories (traditional, non-traditional, and housewives) in terms of their perception of maternal acceptance/rejection;
- 2) there is no significant difference between children of mothers in the three categories in behavioural disposition.

The alternative hypotheses are

- a) children of mothers in the three categories will differ significantly in terms of their perceptions of maternal acceptance/rejection.
- b) children of mothers in the three categories will differ significantly in their behavioural disposition.

## Sample

The subjects were Class 2 students randomly selected from six secondary schools in the cities of Ilorin, Kaduna and Enugu. The sex distribution of students in the schools was similar. For example, single-sex schools owned by the state governments were taken into consideration in the selection. Only day students were used because they would be able to give a more objective evaluation of perceived maternal acceptance/rejection as they were experiencing it by constant and daily interactions with their mothers. Boarders not so often in contact with their mothers would have a different perception because they would have to think about their mother's behaviour. Feelings of home-sickness could also lead to embellished and distorted reports.

Similarity of schools by class and age of children (12-14 years) was taken into consideration. Class 2 was chosen because it is assumed that these students would be able to read and comprehend the requirements of the research instruments better than Class 1 students. Class 2 students are also usually between the age of 12 and 14 years. This particular age range was chosen because the children are young enough not to be too deeply involved in adolescent dynamics and old enough to be able to comprehend the questionnaire. It was also assumed that these children would be more willing to respond truthfully than older children who might be more aware of the social meaning and implications of the questionnaire. The

final sample was between 12 and 14 with a mean of 13 years (SD 0.949).

The schools were selected on the basis of the stipulated criteria. Of the 1,020 Class 2 children randomly selected, only 900 completed the research questionnaire correctly: an 88.24% return rate. Of the 900 students, 452 (50.2%) were boys and 448 (49.8%) were girls; 614 (68.2%) had mothers in traditional employment, 65 (7.2%) in non-traditional employment and 221 (24.6%) had non-employed mothers (housewives).

The children's version of the parental acceptance/rejection questionnaire (1979a), (PARQ) and the Personality assessment questionnaire (1979b) (PAQ) were adapted for the Nigerian cultural context. They were both developed by Rohner et al. (1979a, b). The PARQ was designed to measure the incidence of perceived maternal acceptance/rejection. The PAQ complements the PARQ in determining reported behavioural disposition associated with perceived parental acceptance/rejection. Both the PARQ and PAQ were constructed on a rational theoretical basis (Rohner 1980). Further, to facilitate cross-cultural use, several additional considerations guided their development:

- 1) scales were to have a world-wide applicability;
- 2) the terms within each scale were to have common international references;
- 3) phraseology of the items was to be decentered from standard idiomatic American English.

For each test, items were screened and decentered with the help of two Turkish anthropologists in collaboration with three speakers of standard American English. Subsequently the questionnaires were pilot tested on samples of English-speaking children in New England, USA. Troublesome areas were corrected and standardization validity and reliability of the final versions of the scales were assessed on a sample of 200 4th and 5th grade (the Nigerian grade equivalent being primary classes four and five) children in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Approximately half the children were black and half white, evenly representing middle-class and working-class families. Results showed no significant ethnic, social class, or age differences on either the PARQ or the PAQ. As expected, however, there were sex differences on some of the PAQ scales, such as reported aggressive behaviour (Rohner et al. 1979a, b).

The PARQ is a 60-item self-report designed to measure the way children of 6 to 15 years of age perceive their mothers' behaviour. It consists of four scales:

- 1) maternal warmth (20 items);
- 2) maternal hostility (15 items);
- 3) maternal indifference and neglect (15 items);
- 4) maternal undifferentiated rejection (10 items).

In response to the PARQ, respondents are instructed to ask themselves if the item is basically true or untrue about the way mother treats them. If the statement is basically true, they are instructed to answer "is it rarely true", "is it almost never true", "is it almost always true", "is it sometimes true". The items are scored as follows:

almost always true 4, sometimes 3  
rarely true 2, almost never true 1.

The PARQ is scored on a "PARQ scoring sheet" by summing the item score for each scale and by recording the number on the scale-score line beneath the appropriate scale. From this the composite total is derived.

The PAQ has seven scales which are designed to measure children's perceptions of seven personal and behavioural dispositions which have been associated with parental acceptance and rejection. There are a total of 42 items on the child PAQ, six for each of the following scales:

- 1) hostility aggression;
- 2) dependency;
- 3) self-esteem;
- 4) self-adequacy;
- 5) emotional responsiveness;
- 6) emotional stability;
- 7) world view.

The same response and scoring procedure as the PARQ is also applicable here.

#### **Adapting the PARQ and PAQ**

A field study was conducted on the child versions of the two instruments using a group of randomly selected students in a school in Ilorin. This school is

representative of the group that the final instrument were administered on. A field study of this nature is pertinent in establishing the useability of the instrument in this socio-cultural content. From the field test, it was observed that respondents had problems with certain items in both PARQ and PAQ. The research took note of this and reworded the items by substituting problematic words with simpler ones retaining the original meaning. This was supervised and approved by a psychologist and a linguist (Imoukhome 1987).

The internal consistencies (coefficient alpha) of the four scales on the PARQ ranged from 0.72–0.90 while that of the seven scales of the PAQ ranged from 0.46–0.72 (Rohner et al. 1979a, b). The reliability coefficient of the adapted versions of the child PARQ and PAQ for this culture, ranged from 0.65–0.78 and from 0.76–0.95, respectively. The researcher was personally involved in the administration and collection of data.

#### **Operational definition of terms**

*Maternal acceptance* – The demonstration of love and warmth by mothers either physically or verbally as perceived by the child. Children in this category constitute the acceptance group in this study.

*Maternal rejection* – This is the absence of love, warmth and affection by the mother as perceived by the child. Again, children in this category constitute the rejection group in this study.

*Housewives* – Mothers who are not in paid employment, but spend most of their time at home.

*Traditional occupations* – Occupations that Nigerian society has attributed strictly to its women as appropriate to their sex and role functioning. These include nursing, teaching and secretaryship.

*Non-traditional occupations* – That which Nigerian society has not defined as appropriate to the role functioning of women such as medicine, engineering and the legal profession.

#### **Results**

Nine hundred respondents correctly completed the PARQ and PAQ. In describing the spread of the re-

spondents in line with the variables employed in the study, 43 of them belonged to the rejection group. Of these 21 had mothers in traditional employment, 20 who were housewives and 2 in non-traditional employment; 857 respondents belonged to the acceptance group, 593 had mothers in traditional employment, 201 were housewives and 63 in non-traditional employment. The mean scores of the PARQ suggest that respondents with mothers in non-traditional employment feel the highest degree of maternal acceptance (105.127, SD 19.731) followed by those with mothers in traditional employment (mean scores 108.037, SD 19.501) and mothers who are housewives (mean scores 118.005, SD 19.733). On the PAQ, respondents with mothers in traditional employment had scores that suggest the highest degree of positive behavioural disposition (mean scores 97.806, SD 11.786) followed by housewives (mean scores 95.806, SD 10.844) and then by non-traditional employment (mean scores of 95.381, SD 13.672). It is necessary to point out that for the PARQ scale the lowest possible score is 60 while the highest is 240 and the midpoint is 150. A score of 240, however, means maximum rejection not maximum acceptance. For the PAQ scales, the lowest possible score is 42, highest 168 while the mid-point is 105. In this case a score of 168 means maximum positive behavioural disposition.

Negative behavioural disposition respondents made up 5% of the total sample, as a result no further analysis was done in this group.

Results in Table 1 show the t-test analysis employed in testing hypothesis 1. Two-tailed analysis was used. The table revealed that the hypothesis is rejected for the pair-wise comparison between respondents with mothers who are housewives and traditional employment and again for respondents with mothers who are housewives and non-traditional employment. It was, however, accepted for respondents with mothers in the traditional employment and non-traditional employment groupings.

Results in Table 2 also show the t-test analysis testing hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 is rejected on the basis of the existence of significant differences between the mean scores of respondents with mothers in housewives/traditional employment group and housewives and non-traditional employment group. However, it was accepted for the respondents with mothers in traditional and non-traditional group.

Table 1. Pairwise comparisons of categories of maternal employment for acceptance status using t-test analysis

Maternal employment status	No.	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value	df
Non-employed mothers (housewives) versus Mothers in traditional employment	201 593	118.005 108.037	19.733 19.501	6.236*	792
Non-employed mothers (housewives) versus Mothers in non-traditional employment	201 63	118.005 105.127	19.733 19.735	4.553*	269
Mothers in traditional employment versus Mothers in non-traditional employment	593 63	108.037 105.127	19.501 19.735	1.123	654

\* P 0.05.

Table 2. Pairwise comparisons of categories of maternal employment for behavioural dispositions using t-test analysis

Maternal employment status	No.	$\bar{X}$	t-value	df
Non-working mothers (housewives) versus Mothers in traditional employment	201 593	95.806 97.806	4.549*	792
Non-working mothers (housewives) versus Mothers in non-traditional employment	201 63	95.806 95.381	2.826*	262
Mothers in traditional employment versus Mothers in non-traditional employment	593 63	97.806 95.381	0.897	654

\* P 0.05.

## Discussion

The findings of this study focus attention on two major areas:

- 1) that maternal employment does not pose a risk to mother/child interactions as far as the warmth dimension of mothering is concerned;
- 2) that a mother who is employed outside the home has a more positive effect on her children in terms of the children's perceptions of maternal warmth and their reported behavioural disposition than a mother who is not.

The results further emphasise the fact that very few Nigerian children, regardless of maternal employment, felt rejected, however, children of employed mothers, regardless of the type of employment, reported higher degrees of acceptance than children of housewives. This is an indication that such mothers were perceived by their children as generally more accepting, warmer and kinder, suggesting the type of occupation is closely related to how children perceive their mothers.

These results are important in light of the expectation that mothers at work would introduce a risk factor for child development. The Nigerian experience, however, indicates the contrary and it is in finding the reasons for this that this study is most important.

The primary reason is probably the Nigerian extended family system which acts like a psychological shock-absorber, providing a multiplicity of fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. A second, but related, reason is the frequency with which relatives stay with one another, thus meaning there is nearly always a member of the family around. These reasons explain why very few Nigerian children feel rejected or exhibit negative behavioural tendencies. The extended family system according to Ipaye (in press) is one of the well-known cultural systems in Nigeria. It spreads both horizontally and vertically to cover not only one's own parents and grandparents, but great grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews and of course, their children. An individual, thus, has both maternal and paternal extended families. Theoretically and practically, a child belongs to everyone in the extended family just as everyone belongs to the child.

It is culturally normative for every member of the extended family to show love and affection for the child and not only assume, but effect, a caring disposition to the children. Practically, any member of the extended family could ask or be asked to become the child's guardian when he/she is old enough to be away from his/her biological parents. The function of the extended family includes providing financial support for members in need, giving guidance and advice. The extended family is like a cob-web which no matter at what angle or spot it is touched, vibrates to the centre. Literally, the family has hundreds of eyes and ears watching and listening to the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of its members (Ipaye, in press). This brief exposition on the extended family throws some light on the support the extended family provides and that has been identified as a necessary and important ingredient in children's perceived feelings of maternal acceptance and their reported positive behavioural disposition. Although the extended family influence is recognised as an important factor in mother/child interactions it has, however, in recent times been under a lot of pressure largely due to:

- 1) changes in economic focus, pressures and practices;
- 2) rural-urban migrations (especially post independence 1960 to the present);
- 3) population explosion (Nigeria has a 3% annual growth rate);
- 4) political instability;
- 5) changing cultural values, behaviours and practices (especially due to western influence on traditional Nigerian society).

In spite of these pressures, efforts are being made to preserve the core elements of the extended family with the formation of cultural organisations in urban settlements and attempted redefinition of family relationships such that neighbours are adopted into familyhood. Deliberate efforts are also made to encourage exchange of visits between family and town members from both rural and urban settings. Thus, to some extent, the positive influence of the extended family is being preserved. However, the extent to which this can be fully realized and the degree of its effect will obviously still need to be studied closely. This can form the basis for further research to pro-

vide useful information on the extended family system within the context of changing societal practices.

Perceived feelings of maternal acceptance were highest among children with mothers in non-traditional employment, e.g. medicine, engineering, university lecturing. This was followed by children with mothers in such traditional employment as teaching and nursing, while children whose mothers are housewives showed the lowest degree of perceived maternal warmth.

Possible explanations for why children of working mothers perceive a higher degree of maternal acceptance than those of housewives are: mothers in non-traditional are better paid than those in traditional employment or housewives. As a result, they are better able to fulfil the material needs of their children. As Nigerians are not overtly expressive of love and emotions, the provisions of needs and the fulfilment of wants are a means a mother can show love, affection and care to her child. The child thus perceives this as acceptance. The more money a mother earns, the more she is able to meet the needs of her children and the more the child perceives her behaviour as accepting and loving.

Perhaps one of the most important factors relates to the intensity of interaction between parents and children. Mothers are more likely to reject their children if they are unable to get away from them from time to time, however briefly.

Durojaiye (1976) has observed that mothers who go to work do not necessarily make their children feel rejected. Studies indicate that mothers who work may provide a greater stimulus for their children than the mothers who do not work. The stimulus provided may be the prestige value of the mothers' job or the very fact that the child sees his/her mother as a role model. The present study lends support to this. Durojaiye has attributed this to the fact that mothers who work have a wider experience spectrum and achieve greater self-fulfilment. Working mothers do not feel guilty coming home to their children, but instead desire to make the few hours she has with her children full and enriching. The quality of the contact hours mothers have with their children could be said to be more important than the quantity. Durojaiye went further, explaining that the essential variables are probably the warmth and attitudes of the mother, the family atmosphere and mother's satisfaction with

what she does. As more and more mothers in Nigeria go out to work, a further focus should be on the type of mother substitutes or surrogates that exist in the homes and available infrastructural facilities. The provision of a healthy environment for children's development makes the preservations of the extended family system imperative, especially within the context of changing cultural dynamics.

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