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DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT IN CAREER CENTERED FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY OF COVENANT UNIVERSITY OTA, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study set out to investigate domestic employment in career centered families using Covenant University Ota as a case study. The research relied mainly on data from primary sources. A total of One hundred and ten (110) structured questionnaire were administered to elicit data from respondents which comprise both Teaching and Non-teaching staff of the University. However, eighty three (83) useable instruments were returned with the teaching staff having the highest response rate. Some pertinent research questions were raised while the frequency distribution and simple percentage statistical tools were employed to ascertain the results of the study. The major findings include the risks and benefits associated with domestic employment on career centered families. Also glaring from this study, is the fact that women from career centered families are more active in engaging domestic workers largely females of age group(11-20)years to enable them participate in paid employment outside the family. The need to devise coping strategies to ease domestic activities and for career centered families to reach a compromise on domestic activities are recommended to ensure family stability

Keywords: *Domestic employment, Career, Family, Teaching, Non- teaching staff.*

Background to the study

In virtually all homes in modern Nigerian societies where the demands of employment grossly affect the time spent at home by the career centered families, domestic workers who are also popularly known as '**House helps**', '**Maids**', or '**Domestics**' have come in

recent times to permeate the family households. This phenomenon calls for serious consideration particularly with regard to family stability along the dimension of the performance of men/women and their career. The free on line Dictionary defines '**Career**' as a chosen pursuit, a profession or occupation. Similarly, Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines career as a profession for which one trains and which is undertaken as a permanent calling. Essentially, career centered families are referred to in this article as labor market privilege families who are differentiated from others in lower jobs because they are faring so much better in terms of their jobs and income.

For several years, family scholars have documented the significance of the family as a major institution for carrying out essential functions for individuals and societies: reproductive, physical sustenance, economic maintenance, socialization, nurturance, and meeting sexual and other emotional needs (Bulbolz : 2001).

Essentially, the family is the basic unit of life. It is the fundamental unit of society often referred to as the foundation and the building block of any society. Cherlin (2005) defines the family as a set of people related by blood, marriage or some other agreed upon relationship, or adoption who shares the primary responsibility of reproduction and caring for members of the society. The family is a central institution in all human societies, although it may take different forms. Otite and Ogionwo (1994) defines the family as a vital unit in social organization and social control as well as an important institution in the process of socialization, the family has remained the child's first window with the outside world. It is a social unit to which a child is born and where he acquires the rudiments and norms of the society.

Fuandai, (2004) acknowledges that it is because of this strategic role that the family plays that sociologists and psychologists have described it as the first port of call for the child. It is in the family that a child is socialized into the culture of the society.

Haralambos and Heald (1980:325) states, it is difficult to imagine how human society could function without it. The effect of domestic workers on family relationship will no doubt create an avenue for considering the situation as a dilemma being faced by the average career centred household.

Statement of Problem

Domestic employment has existed as long as society. Most families in pre-industrial and contemporary societies have had to engage

domestic workers at one time or the other to assist with farm work, business, domestic activities, child care etc. The growing trend of this phenomenon in career centered families located in urbanized settings in recent time is becoming a serious problem that calls for concern.

In Nigeria and most countries (industrialized or less industrialized), career women who patronize or recruit domestic workers are fast increasing. Smaller family size no doubt has weakened the traditional role of the extended family thus, hiring of domestic worker remains a viable option if family members are to cope with the demands of their career. This has made some scholars to describe the domestic worker as 'a necessary evil'. While the role of the domestic worker in child care, socialization and domestic work cannot be undermined, there are insinuations concerning the damages done to such families both at present and in the long run. Some of the damages include: theft of valuable, connivance with robbers, leaking of family secrets, transmission of diseases such as HIV/AIDS to family members and betrays by way of husband snatching are a few examples. For the woman, the decision to have domestic worker(s) is usually borne out of two motives: she either loses her respect and family or keeps her career or vice versa. This is one dilemma the career centered family has to tackle in modern day society.

In 1897, a labour union official in Boston declared that "the demand for female labour is an insidious assault upon the home it is the knife of the assassin, aimed at the family circle" (Degler, 1981:396). Despite such fears, the labour participation of mothers globally has increased steadily during the twentieth century, culminating with a majority of mothers working for wages even when their children were young.

Egbue (1999) notes, a very significant feature of women's work in the more recent years, is their participation in former exclusively male employment areas in wage or self-employment.

There is no doubt, that female employment in paid work outside the home puts so much pressure on the career woman and the security of the family institution. In terms of monetary gains and financial independent, the involvement of women in paid employment outside the home has enhanced their social status in the society but the consequent neglect of traditional family responsibilities should be put on check for the survival of the family institution. Today, the domestic worker does virtually everything in home from washing, to caring for the children and cooking of meals for all family members including making the spouse bed.

However, the nature of the economy and job mobility in contemporary time where women now assume the role of breadwinner has necessitated the need for domestic workers. Olatunde, (1997) observed the situation in Nigeria, as one, where modern living has not brought significant reduction in the average women's work load. Rather, women's activities have increased while there are no commensurate improvement in the availability of facilities and amenities.

Today, the category called career woman is too busy satisfying the dictates of her work to the neglect of her primary role as a wife and mother and consequently at the detriment of her family. If one may ask; are our career women not guilty of excess delegation of duties all in the name of modernization?

The dearth of scholarly works on domestic employment in Nigeria coupled with the increasing number of career centered families in urban locations like Europe, Asia and other industrialized societies where various researches have been carried out necessitates a research into the subject in an attempt to identify its prevalence, benefits and risks on the family institution and to recommend possible solutions.

Objectives of study

The cardinal objective of this study is to assess the prevalence of domestic employment in career centered families using Covenant University Ota as a case study.

Other secondary objectives include:

1. To determine the factors responsible for the increasing demand of domestic workers in career centered households.
2. To identify the common risks and benefits associated with employing domestic workers
3. To find out ways of minimizing the risks identified for family stability.

Significance of study

The significance of this study is premised on the extent to which domestic employment has come to permeate career centered families in recent time. This study will assist to provide data on the prevalence of domestic workers among Covenant University Teaching and Non-teaching staff. The findings in this work will form a basis on what exist in other career centered families located in urbanized settings and will be used to generalize the persistence of domestic employment in such urbanized formal settings in Nigeria.

Findings in this study will provide knowledge and insights on prevailing factors that necessitate recruitment of domestic workers by career centered families and also assist to sensitize the general public on some benefits and risks associated with engaging domestic workers. Finally, this work is relevant in identifying viable options and other coping strategies for career centered families in addressing the problem of domestic activities in their respective families.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide this research

1. Why is there resurgence and not a decline in employment of domestic workers by career centered families in recent time?
2. What danger does employing domestic servants pose for family stability and the larger society?
3. Are there benefits in engaging domestic servant?
4. Are career women not guilty of excess delegation of their duties?
5. How best can career centered families handle domestic activities without necessarily engaging domestic workers?

Methodology

The survey research design was employed in the course of the study. Against this background, both Teaching and Non-teaching staff of Covenant University, a private owned educational institution located in Ota, the local government headquarter of Ado-Odo Ota local government Area of Ogun State, South western Nigeria; constitute the population for this study. The choice of this study population was necessitated by the fact that, as an academic institution, many career centered families are found resident here and this makes it convenient for data collection by researcher who incidentally is a staff of the institution.

Questionnaire

A total of one hundred and ten (110) questionnaire was administered to randomly selected Teaching and Non-teaching staff of the university. A 25 item questionnaire was used to elicit data on the prevalence of domestic employment, risks and benefits. The instrument was divided into three sections A, B and C. The first part comprise general questions on respondent's socio demographic data (Sex, age, marital status, family size, highest educational qualification, years of working experience,etc) and questions relating

to domestic workers such as sex, age and number employed so far by career centered family.

The second and last part of the questionnaire comprises questions on perception of domestic workers in terms of risks and benefits for career advancement and ultimately family stability. Solicited responses used a 5 station Likert type scale with choices of Strongly Agreed (5), Agreed (4), Undecided (3), Disagreed (2) and Strongly Disagreed (1)

Access to respondents for questionnaire distribution was less tedious because the researcher is an academic staff of the university. However, response was slow due to busy schedules of respondent's mainly academic staff. Out of one hundred (100) questionnaire administered, a total of eight three (83) useable instruments were returned. The response rate among the female teaching staff was relatively high compared to the men. It was discovered that most male respondents rather prefer their wife to respond to questions on this topical issue. The reason being that, more women engage the services of domestic workers for the family and as such, are in a vantage position to share some of their experiences over time.

Data Analysis

The data elicited from the field survey were collated and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages to interpret results on the basis of which findings in the study was ascertained. In addition, content analysis complimented the quantitative techniques used in this study.

Table 1 – Gender profile of Domestic workers

Sex of Domestic workers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	6	7.2
Female	50	60.2
Both Male & Female	5	6.0
None at All	22	26.5
Total	83	100

Source: Field Survey 2007

Data from table 1 reveals that females are the preferred sex of domestic workers in most career centered homes. A total of 50 females representing 60.2% of the total respondents engaged female domestic workers while 33 respondents representing 39.7% responded otherwise.

Table 2 – Age of Domestic workers employed by Career centered families

Age (Yrs)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 10	4	4.8
11 – 15	24	28.9
16-20	26	31.3
21 Years and Above	9	10.8
Undecided	20	24.1
	83	100

Source: Field survey 2007

Data from table 2 clearly shows that domestic servants of Age 16 – 20years representing 31.3% are mostly preferred. Also, those between 11 and 15years representing 28.9 % are also engaged by career centered families. Surprisingly, 20 respondents representing 24.1% are undecided on age of domestic workers. Does this imply that age is inconsequential? Would the engage just any domestic worker irrespective of Age?

Table 3 – Statistics of Domestic workers employed by career centered families

Statistics of Domestic workers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	23	27.7
2 – 4	33	39.8
5 and Above	5	6.0
None at All	22	26.5
Total	83	100

Source: Field survey 2007

33 respondents representing 39.8% of the total respondents have employed domestic workers numbering between 2 and 4. While 23 respondents representing 27.7% employed only one (1) domestic worker. 26.5% representing 22 respondents does not consider employing domestic workers as necessary. From this result, it is clear that more respondents engage the services of domestic workers in recent time.

Table 4 – Opinion of Respondents on Domestic employment by Career centered families

Item	Statements	Degree of Acceptance or Rejection	Frequency	Percentage
1	House Helps are becoming increasingly common in most career centered families	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	56 25 1 1 0 83	67.5 30.1 1.2 1.2 0 100.0
2	House Helps are a necessity to compliment the roles of career centered families in the home	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	25 41 1 12 4 83	30.1 49.4 1.2 14.5 4.8 100.0
3	Employing House Help is a risk to family values and stability	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	24 37 2 16 3 83	28.9 44.6 2.4 19.3 3.6 100.0
4	Sexual molestation, theft, witchcraft, sorcery and spread of HIV/AIDS are common risks associated with employing House Helps	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	20 40 8 10 5 83	24.1 48.2 9.6 12.0 6.0 100.0
5	Female House Helps are responsible for most marital breakdowns	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	12 26 9 29 7 83	14.5 31.3 10.8 34.9 8.4 100.0
6	House Helps are a necessary evil in career	Strongly Agree Agree	17 35	20.5 42.2

	centered families in terms of their contribution to housework	Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	3 24 4 83	3.6 28.9 4.8 100.0
7	Career women are guilty of excess delegation of duties to Domestics	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	30 41 3 8 1 83	36.1 49.4 3.6 9.6 1.2 100.0
8	Industrialization, modernity and urbanization are partly responsible for high demand of House Helps	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	44 27 3 4 5 83	53.0 32.5 3.6 4.8 6.0 100
9	In recent time, career interfere with primary roles of family members especially women	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	27 38 2 13 3 83	32.5 45.8 2.4 15.7 3.6 100
10	There is a need for career centered families to reach a compromise on housework to reduce the risk of House Helps	Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree Total	42 29 5 6 1 83	50.6 34.9 6.0 7.2 1.2 100

Source: Field survey, 2007

Discussion of Results

Table 4(1) reveals that 56 respondents representing 67.5% strongly agree that domestic employment is becoming increasingly common in career centered families while the remaining 27 respondents responded otherwise. From 4(2), 49.4% representing 41 respondents agree that House helps are a necessity to compliment the roles of career centered families in the home. 44.6% agreed that employing

house help constitute risk to family values and stability, others responded otherwise. Some of the risks identified include, sexual molestation, theft, witchcraft, sorcery and spread of HIV/AIDS. In spite of the risks, 34.9% disagreed that female house helps are responsible for most marital breakdowns while the remaining respondents opined otherwise. The risks notwithstanding, house helps are a necessary evil in career centered families in terms of their contribution to house work. 35 respondents representing 42.2% affirmed the necessity of house helps in recent time while 41 respondents representing 49.9% agreed that career women are guilty of excess delegation of duties to domestic workers. This may account for why most respondents opined that house helps are not responsible for family instability rather other contributing factors must be identified

Industrialization, modernity and urbanization which ushered in more women into paid employment outside the home are crucial factors responsible for increasing demand of House helps. Over 50% of the total respondents, precisely 53% representing 44 respondents strongly agreed with this position. Findings also revealed that in recent time, career interfere with the primary roles of family members especially women as 78.3% of the study population affirmed positive. Finally, 50.6% strongly agreed while 34.9% also agreed that career centered families should reach a compromise on house work in order to reduce the risks associated with House helps.

Summary/Concluding Remarks

The task of this empirical study has been to ascertain the prevalence of domestic employment in career centered families. Industrialization, modernity and urbanization are significant factors influencing increasing participation of families paid in employment as revealed in this study. The quest by most urban families to excel in their chosen career, and have economic independence as well as improved quality of life has no doubt ushered in several positive and negative changes in the family institution and the society at large. With the industrial revolution in Europe and the mass migration and urbanization associated with it, more women got involved in work outside the family and had to grapple with the twin and often demands of organization and domestic work including child care. (Goode, 1966) Women's involvement in paid employment in particular has enhanced their economic security in the society unlike the traditional unpaid domestic work which usually is not reckoned with and assumed as women's natural roles and ways of contributing to society.

While commenting on recent changes in women's occupation, (Afigbo, A. E. in Ijere 1990:45) notes, in most homes in Nigeria, the women's income is a major factor in household budget. Thus women no longer represent only a "reserve of mental and physical energy" to be called upon when the need arises.

However, economic empowerment of women is insufficient for attaining family stability. To a large extent, it has relieved career women of being a liability and outright burden to themselves, the society and mankind in general. Economic contributions and modernization notwithstanding, career women must be alive to their responsibility rather than expressing guilt over for instance leaving children at home but not home due to work demand. Mothers are expected to maintain significant emotional bonds with their children and spouse despite the distance.

The place of domestic workers as necessary evil in the modern family setting no doubt has both positive and negative consequences as revealed in this work. Commenting on the role of House helps, Egbue (1991) stated, though House help system is ideally very useful, many aspects of it are damaging to household security and stability. However, unable to resolve the situation, most women prefer to take their chances with House helps. The scared role of the family as a social institution must not be jeopardized for whatever reasons. Career centered families must live up to their expectation as mothers/ wives and fathers/husbands by carrying out their God-given roles which if compromised will not only lead to misplaced priorities and family values and consequent crack in the family but a lasting effect on the larger society.

Recommendations and Suggestions

The task of this paper has been to examine the prevalence of domestic employment in career centered families using Covenant University as a case study. The following are some recommendations; There's need for the career woman to inculcate into the domestic worker self worth, enough of inhuman treatment, this disadvantaged group must be adequately rewarded and managed in order to minimize the inherent risks involved in such employment. George, (2007) observed that, women have always been at the forefront of campaign against exploitation, they should not be found guilty of perpetuating the same acts of exploitation. The efforts of domestic workers must commensurate with their remuneration. The conditions of service of the domestic worker should be clearly stated and regulations should be set to ensure that they are not exploited. In

other instances, mere compliments and appreciation of their contribution could also win their loyalty in order to reduce betrayals and common risks associated with this group.

It is also vital and of utmost necessity to grant domestic workers a sense of belonging as this will discourage distrust, suspicion and evil practices often the resultant effect when sense of self belonging is missing.

Because domestic workers are useful in relieving career women to paid employment which improve their status to enviable positions in society, the domestic workers should reap the fruits of their labor. Adequate compensation of this group is essential to make them less vulnerable in the society. In addition to their monthly stipends or income, other areas of savings and investments for this group will no doubt increase their loyalty and give them a sense of belonging and commitment. Finally, career centered families can do without engaging domestic workers. Coping strategies such as automation to ease domestic work could be a viable option for families that can afford it. Otherwise, there's need for compromise on housework in terms of increasing male participation in Domestic work. These, could minimize the risks and resources associated with domestic employment.

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