# CHILDREN OF WORKING PARENTS

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## Abstract

This study investigates what the differences between children of working parents and those of nonworking parents are. Also, it's hoped to find how changing sex-roles affect family life and children's attitude toward a positive model. The author reviewed information from the literature and distributed one hundred and fifty questionnaires to four childcare centers to be given to the parents in America. The author does the same survey in Taiwan by interviewing thirty persons instead of distributing questionnaires. The two samples were compared for similar and different situations in America with those in Taiwan. The results support most of the theories from the literature reviewed. Children of working parents are more independent, mature, and sociable. They start to learn the world earlier than children of nonworking parents. There are several positive effects that result from their exploring the world at an early age.

Key words: double-income families, childcare, working parents

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# 雙薪家庭之兒童

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## 摘要

近年來婦女受高等教育的比率提高，投入職場的人數漸增，造成了許多父母親都必須工作的雙薪家庭。本文將探討雙薪家庭對於兒童的生活照顧、個性養成及童年生活等之影響。比較雙薪家庭與單薪家庭的兒童在人格發展上之差異，並比較美國與台灣的家庭生活型式及職業婦女對於兒童教育方式等的異同。本研究除了回顧相關的文獻之外，在美國四個托育中心發送一百五十份問卷做調查，並在台灣進行口頭訪問調查，以比較不同國家間，對於雙薪家庭兒童照顧之差異。研究結果顯示雙薪家庭的小孩比較獨立、成熟和社會化，他們比單薪家庭的小孩更早探索世界，並在個性發展上有正面的影響。

關鍵字：雙薪家庭、兒童照顧、職業婦女

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Changing Family

According to recent reports, there is a remarkable trend in the labor force over the past four decades. This has been the entrance of more mothers with young children into the labor force. There were forty-five percent of families with children under fourteen years of age and forty-four percent double-income families among all of them here in Taiwan three years ago (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, 2006). In 1985, fifty-four percent of the working women had young children under six years of age in America. There are some nonworking mothers who are looking for appropriate childcare to set their children in order to become coproviders. David Bloom offers his opinion of the changing family as follows: Career mothers are climbing the corporate ladder, becoming more influential and valuable to the company and the labor supply is going to tighten because of birth declines in recent decades.

Does effective parenting go along with becoming a mother or a father? Does a person know, automatically, upon giving birth or what is the best for a baby? It's likely that most parents learned how to raise children by observing the adults around them. They got their ideas about feeding, discipline, sex, manners, and generally raising a child through their experiences. These ideas pass from one generation to another. Being an effective parent is one of the most rewarding tasks in life - it's also one of the most challenging. Working parents are usually thinking about how to get the children to go to bed earlier at night, but the children are always trying to postpone bedtime. A tough problem for many working parents is how to find the best way to cope with their children in the evening after work. For children, it's the best time to play around, keep the evening private and with a predictable routine, and then go to bed when they are really tired (Lague, 1987). Part of the challenge involves sorting out all of the conflicting theories of child training one finds in books, newspapers, and television. It's so easy to become confused. Another aspect of the challenge, once a "plan of action" to work out, is to find day care that supports one's ideas of child rearing.

In a special Census Bureau Survey, nonworking mothers with preschool children

were asked whether they would look for work if child care were available to them at "a reasonable cost." The potential percentage of women who would seek jobs would increase if childcare were cheaper and more widely available. The continued demand for child care by working parents and the growing influence of women in the workplace may encourage broader changes in personnel benefits, tax laws, and other aspects of women's lives that will make jobs and babies a little easier (O'Connell & David, 1987).

### 1.2 How Working Parents Deal with Their Children

What kinds of child care arrangements will emerge? Nationally, the current pattern is for husbands of working wives to engage in a considerable amount of childcare. Fathers might be the actual caretakers of the child in their own home, or else situations may exist in which he is responsible for taking them to and fetching them from baby-sitters or other day care arrangements. But why do some husbands of working wives participate more or less than other husbands? Scanzoni thinks that theoretical argument is that sex-role preferences lead women to take purposeful action to achieve certain goals-among these, higher incomes - which makes it possible for them to function as co-providers with their husbands. They need their husbands' participation in domestic tasks. Male participation is therefore also a preference, goal, or interest strongly held by women (Scanzoni, 1978). Today's woman spends less time with her children than a mother of thirty years ago did. Fathers have become more actively involved in the child-rearing process (Long, 1983).

Some career women are divided on the issue of working or mothering. "Are you being selfish if you work?" "Are you giving enough time to your kids?" Some of them choose to work at home. They could earn money, avoid being only a home maker, and take care of their children, too. Sometimes, when one works at home one get the feeling that one may never get away. There is a need to get out and get away to break the monotony of being in one place for such long periods of time. Anyone who works at home complains at one time or another about isolation and loneliness. Informal interaction and relationships between men and women can harmlessly occur in an office whereas the same benign flirtation or conversation becomes more charged, carries more weight, or may have more serious implications when it occurs outside of work (Christensen, 1988).

In the present study, the author investigates what the differences between children of working parents and those of nonworking parents are. How do working parents usually arrange the childcare for their children at an early age? What are the children's reactions and development before and after they attend the child care center? How are children affected by their parents' working? Are working parents trying to do more for their children than nonworking parents?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Child Care Arrangements for Children of Working Parents

Due to the new type of society, there are several kinds of childcare or preschool for choices. Good childcare is also supposed to benefit young children, but the primary impetus for the development of a comprehensive childcare system (Caldwele, 1985) has been the needs of working parents. Young children need developmentally appropriate, nurturing care; parents need assurance that their children are being well cared for while they work. By focusing attention on child development, rather than on schooling, psychology has helped to blur the distinction between child care and early education, because both are necessary components of comprehensive services to contemporary families (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986).

There is a theory from Scanzoni (1978) that preschool children are becoming less of factor than ever before in keeping their mothers out of the labor force. Another census report shows that when mothers work, the most common arrangement for childcare is that "some other relative" (very often the father) looks after the child in the child's own home. In the future, tight labor markets will make it harder to replace experienced female employees who leave work to start a family. The increased entry of women into the labor force has altered the American labor system irrevocably in terms of the work that gets done (O'Connell & David, 1987).

### 2.2 Relationships between Working Parents and Teachers in Order to Help Their Children

The new technology in science, education, psychology, and communication has a deep influence on each of us and affects how we feel about people and things around us. Where and to whom do parents turn for guidance? Many of them turn to teachers.

This kind of cooperation between parents and teachers has become increasingly more important recently.

"Treat your provider as a professional. Care for your childcare person. Building a good working relationship and personal ties - with the caregiver you choose is key to a successful family/care system." (Stapen, 1988)

Teachers provide educational skill, objectivity, and some emotional elements to the relationship with students. The parents can add their knowledge about the child only through love and care between parents and child (Croft, 1979). Lawler (1991) suggests that teachers encourage parents to be positive through the example they set in being supportive, responsive, and dependable.

**2.3 Working Parents Communicate with Their Children in Several Ways**

When parents give children the opportunity to discuss their feelings, they are giving them permission to voice their fears and anxiety, to ask questions, and to seek support and guidance. This is a very simple way by which parent can strengthen their relationship with their children. Children are especially sensitive to a parent's effort to evade certain topics. Many children said that parents frequently brush aside conversations on sensitive subjects. Nevertheless, children need to ask these questions, share their ideas, and hear their parents' thoughts on such personal matters as sexuality, drugs, god, religion, and death. The child's security is affected by parents' "listening time" too (Grollman & Sweder, 1986). This is also the first lesson to teach children how to build interpersonal relationship.

Overall children gave mothers higher ratings in their ability to listen. We heard again and again that after work, mothers make a greater effort to listen to their children than fathers do. Almost two thirds of those aged thirteen and under who were at home alone for more than two hours reported that they often told their mothers "listen to me when I need to talk about something important." Again, the author was troubled to find that those children who are without supervision the most receive the least "listening time." (Grollman & Sweder, 1992) Regardless of the subject they want to talk about, children don't want to be ignored, or interrupted when they are describing an experience or feeling that is important to them. When parents' entire attention is focused on their children, they react with delight because they feel that they are the most important part

of their parents' lives.

Grollman & Sweder (1986) think that working parents can aid their child's physical development by spending time, throwing a ball, or teaching him or her how to skate. Unlike most other experiences during the day, sports give parents and their child an opportunity to set aside some of the role of parent and child, and so simply enjoy the world of play, an important benefit.

### 2.4 Children's Behavior to Get Attention from Working Parents

Children are upset when parents miss the events that are special in their lives. Youngsters want their parents to be available to attend the school picnic or to watch an important game or to listen to a story of lost friendship. Youngsters feel especially rejected when parents promise to come to school or play piano recital and then fail to attend. The responsive parenting is key to the quality of the parent-child relationship (Galinsky, 1999).

Sometimes, children "act up" in order to get attention from their parents. After long hours away from their working parents, they do not want to let the parents go. Thus, they have a hard time saying good-bye at night. A hug, kiss, squeeze or pat on the back communicates affection. Many children want and need both parents to be more physically demonstrative. Unfortunately, our society discourages men from being physically expression, particularly toward their male children. Fathers are often reluctant to express themselves in this manner (Grollman & Sweder, 1986).

### 2.5 Children's Development in Self-esteem and Mentality, and Their Reaction to Attending Child Care Centers

A report, tested on children's questionnaires, showed that fathers play a more important role in their youngsters' development of self-esteem than that of strong mother contact. With a strong sense of self-esteem, we are better able to relate to people around us, and to look upon the present and the future as a challenge we are more capable of meeting. Without a strong sense of self-worth, it would be a struggle to go through each day. Grollman & Sweder, (1992) said that children's sense of self-esteem develop in large part in response to parents' words and behavior. Children see themselves reflected through parents' eyes. The strong correlation we found

between high self-esteem in each category and high parent contact led us to examine more closely the relation between high self-esteem and the amount of time children spent at home alone after school. To understand this relationship better, Sweder separately analyzed the responses of youngster aged thirteen and younger. The findings were dismaying. Children who were home alone for two hours or more second lowest of all children in all age groups on three of the four inventories: general, academic, and home self-esteem; they scored second lowest on social self-esteem. Overall, for children in child care, better quality child care predicted a small increase in cognitive outcomes at preschool age. Higher quality child care had the same positive effect on children's cognition, impulsivity, and social competence regardless of the quality of parenting they received at home (Duncan, 2003).

Expressions of affection are an important means of helping children feel good about themselves, but determining if you are showing enough or not enough affection may be difficult. To learn the degree of physical and verbal affection that children of working parents receive, Grollman used the Hollander Parent Contract Scale, together with other supplementary material. This exercise is called the "How My Parents Act Questionnaire." Children of both sexes and all ages clearly feel that their mothers consistently demonstrate a greater amount of love and affection than do their fathers (Grollman & Sweder, 1986).

**2.6 Summary of Literature**

Children of working parents want to understand what their parents do at work and what the world of work is like. For the youngsters, they are especially interested in knowing what parents enjoy about their job, what they like and what they don't like, and whether or not they like the people with whom they work. Working mothers' feelings of self-assurance and self-worth also convey these positive outlooks to their children. Children now have more positive female role models. Many children do not subject to having both parents employed outside the home, but almost all youngsters object to their parents giving the appearances of referring work over family life. Children need a sense of family time after the workday is over. Sweder said that children of working ey have more knowledge about occupation and different roles in our society. Youngsters today have a surprising and gratifying awareness of their parents, both

mothers and fathers, as whole people. (Grollman & Sweder, 1992)

Children learn other important lessons and values by watching how parents handle work outside the home, and they are aware of the disadvantages in parents' employment. Lew (1986) agrees there are some positive effects of working mothers for children. Self-reliance is the key issue. Children have to discover their own potential ability. They do this by learning they are able to do something. Also, it's giving children the space to discover their own potential ability. The second is role models. Women who work in meaningful role other than mothering provide their children with other positive role models. Interdependence and trust are also included. If dependence is a negative goal in raising children, then introducing other people into child's life is a positive experience. A positive goal is to create interdependence in the parent-child relationship. Children learn that parents can not always stay with them all the time, but that they trust them to return. Materialism is the last issue. Children learn the direct correlation between working for pay and the economic benefits at an early age (Lew, 1986).

## 3. Questionnaire Survey in America

### 3.1 Methodology

There are fourteen questions in the author's questionnaire. All of the returned questionnaires were fully answered by parents with different careers as well as nonworking parents in America. Those parents interviewed in Taiwan were teachers in College or in a Junior High School. The results in the survey both in America and in Taiwan support all of the theories from the reviewed literature except for the arrangements of day care for young children.

In the author's survey, eighty-one percent of parents are working. Eighty-five percent of them agree that the present economy makes it necessary for parents of small children to work. Thirteen percent of parents agree that day care facilities in good quality and cost make it easily possible for a parent to work outside the home and only twenty-two percent of them have different opinions. Fifty-six percent of working parents need closer relationships with their child's teachers, while forty-four percent of them do not. Forty-four percent of children live together with their immediate family.

Children who don't live together with all members in their family express displeasure that they can't stay with them all of the time. Seventeen percent of the children are the first one or the last one to be picked up at the childcare center. Most of them feel happy to stay at the childcare center. In the meantime, the day care center is the working parents' preference to childcare by forty-four percent. Relatives and other arrangements are the next most popular. Sixty-three percent of children tend to demand attention from parents when they return home after work, whereas thirty-seven percent of them do not. Thirty-nine percent of working parents need childcare on weekends and/or in the evenings when they have their own activities.

Eighty-three percent of children at day care center get along with all the other children. In general, parents encourage them to have good relationships with other children. Eighty-one percent of parents have a special time to be with their children on holidays or after work at night. They are trying to help their children in building interdependent relationships. There are also positive effects for children who attend a child care center. They become more active, know a lot about various kinds of activities, learn how to write, read, and cooperate with other children. They improve their interpersonal relationships as well.

Children of working parents understand the world of working earlier, and usually look forward to weekends or holidays. They are more mature for their age, and begin to learn about the society and interdependence at an early age.

### 3.2 Analysis of Questionnaire

In order to connect the related ideas among questions, the author discusses the questions in a sequential order.

Q 1 "Are you a working parent?"

| | % of forty-two parents |
|---|---|
| Yes | 81% |
| No | 12% |
| Student | 7% |

This supports what Lague and O'Connell say. The changing family affects the sex-role in modern society. There are more and more working mothers. Most of

children have working parents.

Q. 2 "Working parents' preference to child care for their children at 3-5 years old."

| | % of parents' preference |
|---|---|
| Day care center | 44% |
| Baby-sitters | 10% |
| Neighbors | 2% |
| Home day care | 10% |
| Relative | 7% |
| Others | 27% |

In addition to working outside the home, some parents go out several nights during the week to attend classes, evening meetings, or exercise groups.

Q. 3 "Do you need child care on weekends and/or in the evenings."

| | % of parents' need of child care |
|---|---|
| Yes | 12% |
| No | 61% |
| Sometimes | 27% |

This means that thirty-nine out of one hundred working parents have their own activities and leisure time. Children frequently ask "Why do my working parents have to go out so much?" Most children feel rejected when their parents continually place their personal needs for relaxation or entertainment above their own needs. As Grollman & Sweder (1992) says, children want to enjoy being with parents and can not easily understand why their parents frequently choose to spend their time with others.

Q. 4 "Day care facilities of good quality and cost make it easily possible for a parent to work outside the home."

| | % of parents' comments |
|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 24% |
| Agree | 54% |
| Don't know | 5% |
| Strongly disagree | 5% |
| Disagree | 12% |

Day care centers seem to be the nice arrangement for children of working parents.

Q. 5 "The present economy makes it necessary for parents of small children to work?

| | % of parents' comments |
|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 29% |
| Agree | 56% |
| Don't know | 2% |
| Disagree | 12% |
| Strongly disagree | 1% |

Most parents said that both of them work because of economy, or the changing sex-role in contemporary society.

Q. 6 "With whom does your child live?"

| | % of children |
|---|---|
| With parents | 29% |
| With mother | 7% |
| Mother/sister/brother | 5% |
| Mother/sister | 17% |
| Parents/brother/sister | 42% |

Children who do not live together with all members of their immediate family express displeasure that father can't stay with them, and have a hard time with brothers or sisters in case they don't stay at home everyday. Of course, they miss their fathers, and sometimes they try to get male attention. One of the children is more cranky after the visit of her father. Due to parents' working, children are certainly affected by the different living arrangements in several ways.

Q. 7 "Since you are a working parent, do you think you need closer relationships with your child's teachers to understand and help your child more?"

| | % of parents' comments |
|---|---|
| Yes | 56% |
| No | 44% |

Those parents who agree at the closer relationship with teachers develop it in several ways. The first is to visit the teacher periodically. They can understand their

children more and know how to cooperate with teachers to help their children's development. They try to have more contact with teachers by parent/teacher conference, evaluation, or talking to teachers by phone call.

Q. 8 "Does your child get along with all the other children at child care center?"

| | % of parents' answers |
|---|---|
| Yes | 83% |
| No | 10% |
| Sometimes | 7% |

Many parents try to help their children to have good relationships with the other children at the childcare center. They encourage friendships and listen to child's interaction with other children, try to teach their child how to share and what good manners are, explain that it is nice to have lots of friends. The parents try to reinforce the idea that child should have things, take turns, and think of other people's feelings. Youngsters of working parents may have fewer opportunities to communicate with their parents. Most children love to talk, to explore ideas and sort out experiences. They need to share their feelings about growing up and hear parents relate parents' knowledge and insights. We must first be willing to listen to communication with children.

Q. 9 "Do working parents have special time to be with their child either on holiday or after work at night?"

| | % of parents' comments |
|---|---|
| Yes | 81% |
| No | 19% |

Parents usually read books to children before bedtime, watch special programs, or go to movies on holidays. Some of them go for a walk, play ball, and go to church. They set a time to play together with their children.

Q. 10 "Does your child tend to demand attention from you when you return home after work at the end of the day?"

| | % of children |
|---|---|
| Yes | 63% |
| No | 37% |

Many children want to play or stay with parents when parents return home. When parents pay attention to the other children, he/she usually interrupts or cries. Some of them get parents involved in activities by asking questions, reading books, and playing games.

Q. 11 "Is your child the latest one to be picked up at the child care center at the end of the day?"

| | % of parents' answers |
|---|---|
| Yes | 17% |
| No | 73% |
| Sometimes | 10% |

Most children like to stay at the childcare center though they are the latest one to be picked up. They are accustomed to play and enjoy themselves there. When parents come earlier, they are reluctant or not ready to leave. Only one of the children gets worried. She doesn't want to be the last one to be picked up because she is scared to stay alone.

Q. 12 "What's your child's mental development after he/she attends the child care center?"

The author's survey shows that children learn a lot about letters, concepts, singing, drawing pictures, etc. They are exposed to a wide variety of learning experiences, and develop an interest of learning. They have good attitude about attending school and good dealings with others during social activities. They seem to be older than they really are. Because their parents are working, they attend the childcare center at an early age, and begin to learn all these things earlier than children of nonworking parents.

Q. 13 "What's the difference in the development of your child's self-esteem before and after he/she attend the child care center?"

Children become more independent, build higher self-esteem, and build self-confidence after attending the childcare center. They learn more about writing and other activities, feel happy to attend the childcare center, and are not so shy as before. They are more aware of things around them, more relaxed, and less noisy at home.

Q. 14 "How is your child affected by your working?"

Most children can handle it pretty well. They become more independent and sociable. They prefer to stay with parents. They are interested in knowing their parents' jobs, proud of it, and like to visit parents' office. They are trying to get more attention from parents. They are always expecting the coming weekend in order to stay with their parents as long as they like, so they pay more attention to the calendar.

### 3.3 Summary of Questionnaire

The results of the author's survey support the theories from the reviewed literature in several ways. First, children of working parents are exposed to the world of work earlier. They have more knowledge about work at an early age and about different roles in our society. Also, the changing family affects the American family's members. Second, there are more and more working parents because of the needs of current society. The present economy makes it necessary for parents of small children to work. These are supported by what O'Connell, Lague, and Croft said. Third, day care facilities of good qualities and cost make it easily possible for a parent to work outside the home. Scanzoni has the same opinion about parents' working. Then, Stapen and Croft agree that the close relationships between working parents and teachers are necessary. This is also the result from the survey. The majority of parents agree that they need closer relationships with teachers. Next, Grollman thinks that working parents need to spend some time to play together with their children to meet their needs of attention from parents'. In the survey, eighty-one percent of working parents have special time to be with their children either on holiday or after work at night. Most children try to get more attention from parents, too. Finally, children of working parents get along with other children at childcare center better than children of nonworking parents. On the other hand, the result of the survey of working parents' preference to child care for their children 3-5 years of age are that half of them choose the day care center. Scanzoni thinks that the use of childcare is the least often used arrangement in the United States. Also, according to the survey, children improve a lot in self-esteem and intelligence or metal ability after attending childcare center. Sweder thinks that parents' expressions of affection are the important means of helping build children's self-esteem and self-worth.

## 4. Comparison of Children of Working Parents on America and Those in Taiwan

Children of working parents seem to be a worldwide problem to people of the 21th century and also the future years. Working parents in America have the same kind of situation as those in Taiwan. There are more and more working mothers here. Most of them prefer a day care center if their children are over 3 years of age. But, they usually send their children of 0-3 years old to day care homes before they go to their office, and fetch them back after work as day care centers for small children are still not available. Children's reactions to both self-esteem and mental development in Taiwan are similar to what children have in America. Children become more active, have confidence in themselves, get knowledge of various activities, and know about good manners after attending a day care center.

Q.1 "Working parents' preference to child care for their children at 3-5 years old."

| | % of U.S.A. parents' comments | % of Taiwan parents' comments |
|---|---|---|
| Day care center | 44% | 50% |
| Relatives | 17% | 36% |
| Baby-sitters | 10% | 7% |
| Neighbors | 2% | 0% |
| Home day care | 10% | 0% |
| Others | 17% | 7% |

Q.2 "Day care facilities in good quality and cost makes it possible for a parent to work outside the home."

| | % of U.S.A. parents' comments | % of Taiwan parents' comments |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 24% | 15% |
| Agree | 54% | 57% |
| Don't know | 5% | 0% |
| Disagree | 5% | 21% |
| Strongly disagree | 12% | 7% |

Q.3 "The present economy makes it necessary for parents of small children to work."

| | % of U.S.A. parents' comments | % of Taiwan parents' comments |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 29% | 21% |
| Agree | 56% | 50% |
| Don't know | 2% | 0% |
| Disagree | 12% | 29% |
| Strongly disagree | 1% | 0% |

Q.4 "With whom does your child live?"

| | % of U.S.A. children | % of Taiwan children |
|---|---|---|
| Immediate family | 42% | 100% |
| with parents | 29% | 0% |
| with mother | 7% | 0% |
| Mother/sister/brother | 5% | 0% |
| Mother/sister | 17% | 0% |

Q.5 "Since you are a working parent, do you think you need closer relationships with your child's teachers to understand and help your child more?"

| | % of U.S.A. parents' comments | % of Taiwan parents' comments |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 56% | 9% |
| No | 44% | 14% |
| Sometimes | 0% | 7% |

The framework of families in Taiwan is quite different from that of American families. Most people in Taiwan live together with all members of their families. Some of them even have grandparents, uncles, or aunts in their families. But, children of working parents still try to get full attention from their parents. Though all the members in their families love them, and pay attention to them, they need more attention from their parents. Most working parents (especially working mothers) in Taiwan, almost terminate all of their own activities to stay with their children on weekends or in the evenings. This is another big difference in comparing with working parents in America.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of the author's survey support most of the theories from the literature reviewed. Children of working parents are more independent, mature, and sociable. They start to learn the world earlier than children of nonworking parents. There are several positive effects that result from their exploring the world at an early age.

Children's reactions to both self-esteem and mental development in Taiwan are similar to what children have in America. Children become more active, have confidence in themselves, get knowledge of various activities, and know about good manners after attending a day care center.

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