

Who's Taking Care of the Children?

Around the world, more and more women are working outside home. In the United States, around 70 percent of women with children under 18 have another job beside that of mother and homemaker. Most are employed in traditional fields for females such as clerical, sales, education, and service. However, a growing number choose a career that necessitates spending many hours away from home. These women are engineers, politicians, doctors, lawyers, and scientists, and a few have begun to occupy executive positions in business, government, and banking, breaking through the so-called glass ceiling.

Monetary factors influence woman to work. Some are employed full-time, some part-time, and some seek creative solutions such as flex-time work schedule and job sharing. But in most cases, one income in the household is simply not enough, so both parents must work to support the family.

A backward glance from this side of the new millennium reveals that the role of married women in the U.S. has changed radically since the 1950s and 1960s, when it was taken for granted that they would stay home and raise the children. This is still the image so often portrayed in American movies and advertising. In fact, traditional combination of the husband as exclusive breadwinner and the wife as a stay-at-home mom caring for one or two children today accounts for only ten percent of the population in the United States.

Who, then, is taking care of the children?

When extended families — children, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles — lived in the same town and sometimes in the same house, a relative of the working parents took care of the children. But beginning with the Industrial Revolution, people moved away from farms and small towns to find better job opportunities in larger cities. Now, most often, the family is just the immediate family- mother, father, and children.

So who watches the children while the parents work? Answers to this question are varied.

- Some parents put children in day-care facilities.
- Some parents put children in informal day-care centers in private homes.
- Companies and hospitals are realizing that providing daycare at the workplace makes for happier and more productive employees.
- Individuals or couples that are wealthy enough have a nanny, a woman who comes to care for the children in their own home. Many of these child-care workers are from other countries, e.g, South America, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and the Philippines.

A trend that has emerged recently is the sharing of child-care responsibilities between husband and wife. Young couples will try to arrange their work schedules so that they work opposite hours or shifts in order that one parent is always home with the children. Since the child care is expensive, this saves money for the young couple trying to establish themselves and provide a secure environment for the family. Husband and wife may also share household chores. Some fathers are just as capable as mothers at cooking dinner, changing and bathing the baby, and doing the laundry.

In some cases, the woman's salary is for the family expenses. These cases are still fairly rare. One positive trend, however, is that fathers seem to be spending more time with their children. In a recent survey, 41% of the children sampled said they spend equal time with their mothers and fathers. "This is one of our most significant cultural changes," says Dr. Leon Hoffman, who co-directs the Parent Child Center at the New York Psychoanalytic Society. In practice for over 30 years, Hoffman has found a "very dramatic difference in the involvement of the father — in everything from care taking to general decision making around kids' lives."

Another factor has recently been added to the child-care formula. The number of people who work from home nearly full time rose 23% from the last decade. Some are self-employed and some work for companies. The accessibility of technology-computers, faxes, and teleconferencing — has made it easier for at-home workers to be constantly in touch. Of the 5.5 million "stay-at-home" parents in 2004, 5.4 million were moms and 98,000 were dads. Among these stay-at-home parents, 42 percent of mothers and 29 percent of fathers had their own children under three living with them. Thirty-nine percent of mothers and 30 % of fathers were under the age of 35. Will this new flexibility in the workforce bring a positive change for the well-being of children? Only time will tell.

Glass Ceiling (e)	a. A person who cares for children in their home.
Flex-time (h)	b. A person who earns the money for a family.
Job sharing (c)	c. Two people who each works part time at a job.
Radically (f)	d. Tendency or movement in the course of events.
In touch (l)	e. Invisible barrier to promotion.
Portrayed (g)	f. To a great degree, completely
Breadwinner (b)	g. Shown or represented in a pictorial way.
Extended family (i)	h. Varying in arrival and departure times at work.
Immediate family (j)	i. Children, parents, grandparents and other relatives.
Trend (d)	j. Children and parents
Nanny (a)	k. Working for yourself
Self-employed (k)	l. Able to contact each other.