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Maternal Employment and Childcare Responsibilities: Challenges and Coping Strategies of Working Mothers in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, Western Region of Ghana

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Abstract:

Women's engagement in the workforce has risen significantly and has been accompanied by greater challenges in balancing roles between paid work and childcare. This article identified the challenges confronting working mothers with children aged 0-3 years and examined how working mothers managed the challenges they encountered in the care of their children in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. A cross-sectional descriptive survey research approach was adopted. A sample of (N = 150) working mothers comprising teachers, nurses, bankers, traders, hairdressers and seamstresses were conveniently sampled from four Reproductive and Child Health Centers to complete questionnaires. Findings revealed that challenges of working mothers were time constraints, safety and security of their children at care center, mother child relationship affected due to less time spent with children and increased financial cost as a result of using alternative childcare. The areas of childcare most affected by mothers work were eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods whereas areas the least affected by mothers' work were breastfeeding and inculcating family values in kids. To cope with the challenges of maternal employment, working mothers worked shifts, alternated work hours, enjoyed maternity leave and used alternative childcare. Challenges and constraints of working mothers influenced their decision on the use of alternative childcare and invariably determined the coping strategies adopted. An effective child care arrangement for working mothers should be institutionalized and there should be an extension of the three month maternity leave to six months to help minimize the challenges working mothers encounter.

Keywords: Childcare, challenges, coping strategies, maternal employment, working mothers

1. Introduction

Women's engagement in the workforce has risen significantly and this has been accompanied by greater challenges in balancing roles between paid work and family obligations such as childcare. Females constitute 50.7% (15.6 million) of Ghana's 30.8 million population, additionally 53.0% of females aged 15 years and above are economically active and employed (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). This depicts an active female population employed in different sectors of the economy both formals, informal, private and public with employment cutting across agriculture, service, craft, professional, clerical support workers, managers, technicians, associate professionals, machine operators among others. Ghana's total fertility rate is 3.1% for women aged 15 - 49 years with the peak ages being 25 - 29 and 30 - 34 years (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). This statistics is significant as it depicts that majority of the economically active women in Ghana are within their reproductive ages.

The burden of combining paid work outside with childcare responsibilities can be overwhelming for most mothers. According to Kim and Kim (2013), working mothers' varied duties have a significant impact on their psychological well-being. Working mothers, who get stressed as a result of their various jobs and overburdened household chores, may experience anger, jealousy, humiliation, guilt, and work-family conflict. Long working hours have been found to be significantly associated with conflict between work and family across countries (Waterhouse *et al.*, 2017). Maintaining a successful career and motherhood comes at a great cost for all over the world. Working mothers are confronted with a dilemma of issues ranging from use of alternative childcare options, alternating work schedules, maintaining family relationships, building successful careers and most importantly being good mothers to their babies. Several literature provide evidence of the struggles working mothers go through to give the best of care to their babies as well maintaining and securing their jobs (Kaufman & Bair, 2021; Luppi & Arpino, 2016; Meirong, 2013; Hixson-Somanchi, 2010; Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Hansen, 1991; Moore, 1978). The challenges faced by working mothers are of social, economic and stress related health problems (Bianchi, 2000; Kestenbaum, 2004). Ghanaian women are employed in different sectors of the economy and engaged in varying activities with different work conditions. As indicated by Tetteh (2005), mothers working in the formal sector are unable to take their children to work since many offices both private/public do not have space for their employees' children. For mothers in the informal sector they may have their children

with them, however these babies usually obstruct their productivity. So, as a result, the Ghanaian woman is usually disadvantaged, as she is unable to fully use her ability at work due to family responsibilities.

Notwithstanding the numerous challenges working mothers encounter, they always strive to achieve a balance between work and childcare responsibilities by adopting coping strategies. Evidence from literature shows that active participation in both work and family responsibilities invariably leads to work-family conflict, particularly for working moms (Aryee, 2005), consequently literature equally shows evidence of coping strategies adopted by most working mothers. Research suggests that coping strategies help to moderate the conflict between job pressures and family duties. Voydanoff (2002) states that numerous mediation mechanisms may be used to harness the harmonious link between work-family interactions. Herbst, Coetzee and Visser (2007) describe coping as 'an attempt to establish conditions that allow an individual to continue progressing toward desired objectives... coping is a reaction that occurs in the aftermath of a stressful experience.' Coping, according to Higgins, Duxbury and Lyons (2008), is a reaction to external stresses that prevents or reduces emotional suffering. The use of coping strategy is important for working mothers in today's world where women cannot separate work responsibilities from childcare responsibilities. It is for this reason why scholarly researches are now focusing on coping strategies adopted working mothers to deal with phenomenon of maternal employment and childcare.

Results from the Ghana Population and Housing Census 2021 shows the western region has 2.1 million population with 49.3% (1013.825) being females. Out of this female population 54.4% (360.421) are economically active and 46.0% (303,495) are gainfully employed in different sectors of the economy. The economically active and employed populations in the western region as captured are aged 15 years and above. This is an indication that they fall with the reproductive age ranging between 15- 49 years, representing 544.760 females. Since there seem to be no option for today's women to dichotomize childcare responsibilities and paid work, these results raise fundamental questions on females working and bearing children, thus will be faced with the challenges of maternal employment and childcare responsibilities. From the aforementioned, the purpose of this study is to identify challenges confronting working mothers in Sekondi-Takoradi and examine the coping strategies working mothers use to manage the challenges of combining work and childcare responsibilities. The study objectives aim at identifying the challenges confronting working mothers with children aged 0-3 years and examining how working mothers manage the challenges they encounter in the care of their children in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. To empirically understand the phenomenon of maternal employment and childcare as well as the challenges and how working mothers in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis manage the challenges, the following research questions were posed to be answered:

- What are the challenges confronting working mothers in the care of their children in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis?
- How do working mothers manage the challenges they encounter in the care of their children in Sekondi-Takoradi?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Challenges of Working Mothers

Many working mothers struggle with finding better ways to balance work, social life and childcare. This leads to stress related health problems such as depression, anxiety and lack of sleep (Bianchi, 2000; Spurlock, 1995). Other challenges as indicated by Kestenbaum (2004) are social and economic-inclined such as loss of leisure times and increased financial demands due to the use of alternative childcare services. The common challenges confronting most working mothers with childcare responsibilities are time constraints, safety and security issues, decision making, logistical problem, financial issues, professional development issues, health issues and interpersonal issues.

Managing time is very important in the development of human lives (Pearce, 2009). Having the time and managing it to ensure a balance between work schedules, childcare, social life and family or household responsibility, certainly does not come easy for working mothers (Bianchi, 2000). Demands from work, family and childcare responsibilities need time to get activities done within stipulated time frames, thus making time for each activity can be very strenuous for working mothers. Even in situations where alternative childcare is used, working mothers cannot rule out time constraints and conflict since working mothers still have their primary responsibilities at home. Children can acquire all manner of behaviors from their care givers and the environment within which the care is being provided.

The safety and security of babies is a major concern for working mothers. Leaving a young baby with care givers is something that most mothers find difficult doing (Kestenbaum, 2004). Similarly, a challenge, most working mothers face, is taking decisions on type of alternative childcare to use. Good decisions are made when there is adequate information about alternatives. Making a decision about what type of alternative childcare to use is difficult for mothers in the face of lack of information on alternatives as well as counseling opportunities (Delly & Gallant, 1993). There is minimal information on childcare types and their quality especially in developing nations. Therefore, most working mothers rely on informal sources of information from friends and relatives as a basis for the decisions they make. In the face of this, a lot of misconceptions are carried along which influence mothers in their choice (Mehra *et al*, 1983). According to Delly and Gallant (1993), these decision making related challenges include coordinating the details of the mother's working day, meeting basic needs of babies such as feeding patterns, breastfeeding, weaning, arranging one's hours at work, dealing with a sick child, taking the child to the doctor for checkups, getting babies ready for child care centers before leaving for work among others. It is a known fact that nursing mothers, who return to work before an infant is weaned, often have to make complicated arrangements for expressing and storing breast milk during the working day due to inflexible work schedules which give little room for adjustment in relation to meeting basic needs of children.

According to Kestenbaum (2004), logistical problem is another challenge affecting working mothers. These problems include the cost of childcare arrangements, problems with continuity in the use of alternative childcare and sometimes loss of income related to missed work days. The cost involved in the use of alternative childcare options for babies while mothers work can drain a family's financial resources. Childcare attendants have to be paid, feeding pattern of babies needs to be changed especially when they are infants and cost involved in transporting babies in the case of using center based care or family care and sometimes relative care outside a child's home. Most women fear for their professional development when they start having babies. They indicate that childbirth is likely to derail women from seeking professional growth through further education and giving off enough time to learn about their work (Houston, *et al.*, 2002). Some mothers are forced to resign or take leaves by forfeiting their salaries to make time for their babies. Working mothers in many fields experience conflicts between motherhood and professional advancement. Kestenbaum (2004) also states that working mothers, who cut back their employment to part-time work, often lose opportunities for promotions. Draznin (2004) reports that the professional aspirations of working mothers are not taken seriously by colleagues or superiors particularly, if they quit working for some time to stay home with their children, a term called 'The Mommy Tenure Track'. Some women feel too threatened by the repercussions of time off work to even take maternity leave; others report problems on re-entering the workforce after such a leave. Working mothers in highly competitive professions are reluctant to lighten their workloads or schedules for fear that such measures will signal a lower level of commitment or ability than that of their male peers and be automatically assigned to the infamous 'Mommy tenure track'.

Working mothers are more vulnerable to stress-related illnesses than those who remain at home with their children (Facione, 1994). Many working mothers feel guilty about their decision to continue working while their babies are at a tender stage. In addition, working mothers often do not get enough sleep. Hittner (1998), posit that sleep deficits are known to make women more susceptible to infectious illnesses in addition to automobile or workplace accidents. The guilt of not making enough time for babies might lead to post-partum depression. It is also argued that 80% of mothers experience post-partum depression syndrome not because of changes in hormonal systems but also because there is an element of guilt that their maternal responsibility is being relegated and rather prominence is being given to their work (Facione, 1994). Finally, Kestenbaum (2004) states that many working mothers, particularly those whose jobs give them little control over their work (such as food service, factory assembly-line work, retail sales work, among others), come home at night feeling emotionally frustrated as well as physically tired thus, affecting mother and child bonding. Working mothers withdraw emotionally from their babies whereas some mothers worry about the impact of their work on their marital relationship with their partner.

2.2. *Managing the Challenges of Working Mothers, Coping Strategies Adopted by Working Mothers*

There are a number of different strategies that working mothers use to balance the demands of workplace, child care and family. Several studies conducted over the years have been able to identify some strategies that mothers, all over the world, employ to deal with the pressure associated with maternal employment and childcare (Biagioli, 2003; Anderson & Eamon, 2004; Draznin, 2004; Strazdins *et al.*, 2004). These include working mothers adopting an egalitarian approach to household responsibilities and childcare, making childcare arrangements, alternative work arrangements- (flexible work time, shift working, job sharing, engaging in part time work/ informal work, telecommuting), self-employment and role reversal.

- **Egalitarian Approach to Household Responsibilities:** To reduce the burden of childcare responsibilities on working mothers, all members in the household must assist to lessen the burden on working mothers (Bianchi, 2000).
- **Childcare Arrangements:** According to American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry report (2000), childcare arrangement is an inevitable option for most working mothers to cope with the stress of work and childcare.
- **Alternative Work Arrangements:** To reduce the report of high levels of stress, anxiety and fatigue, they resort to alternative work schedules. Alternative work schedules, according to Biagioli (2003), include flexible work time, working on shift, job sharing and telecommuting, working on part time basis and employers having flexible work schedule for working mothers after maternity leave.
- **Role reversal:** According to Wentworth and Chell (2001), role reversal is an extreme strategy used by some mothers where a mother becomes the sole family breadwinner, while the father assumes the role of 'house husband.' As indicated by Deacon and Firebaugh (1988), household work performance and employment has been classified as traditional, additive and transitional and reversed traditional where husbands fulfill the household responsibilities while the wives work away from home.
- **Self-employment:** Biagioli (2003) believes that being self-employed is the key to reducing maternal employment stress. She said some working mothers who want a challenging but flexible work schedules are drawn to self-employment. Being the boss enables one to have flexible work schedules, delegate activities to workers and only play a supervisory role.

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was used for the study to describe the phenomenon and help answer research questions (Kumar, 1999). The study was conducted in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis of the Western Region of Ghana, an area classified as strictly urban with a population of 126,038 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Economics active female are engaged in both formal and informal sector employment. The population for the study

involved all working mothers with children aged 0-3 years. Respondents for the study were 150 working mothers with children aged 0-3 years during data collection. They were conveniently sampled from four Reproductive and Child Health Centres (RCHC) that were purposively sampled. The respondents were selected from formal sector employment namely- teachers, nurses, bankers and from the informal sector employment namely- traders, seamstresses and hairdressers. The convenient sampling technique was used due to accessibility and proximity of respondents to the Reproductive and Child Health Centres which were purposively sampled to give a fair and balanced representation of working mothers who attend post natal care within the metropolis (Jackson, 2009; Cresswell, 2007). The ages of respondents' ranged between 20-45 years with ages 30-34(24.7%) years representing the highest percentage of all participants and 20-24(8.0%) representing the least percentage for all respondents. A structured questionnaire consisting of an introductory, bio-data part and 3 sub-sections was used to elicit relevant information. Introductory and bio-data parts described the purpose of the study and sought permission from respondents whereas the bio-data captured information on participants' age, marital status, level of education and occupation. Section A elicited information on challenges confronting working mothers using a rating scale of 1 (strongly Agree) and 5 (strongly Disagree). Section B asked working mothers to rate from highest to lowest how work has affected childcare and the last section C had a list of coping strategies for working mothers to select the ones applicable. Data was collected at the Reproductive and Child Health Centres over a 4 week period. The consent of all respondents was sought before administering questionnaires. Data was analysed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences- SPSS to generate results for discussion.

4. Results

Challenges	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Teachers										
Increased financial cost	15	60	10	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety and security of children at care center	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time constraints	22	88	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother suffers stress related illnesses	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers have work related problems.	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother-child relationship is affected due to less time spent with children	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marital and family problems	16	54	9	36	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nurses										
Increased financial cost	17	68	8	32	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety and security of children at care center	23	92	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time constraints	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother suffers stress related illnesses	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers have work related problems	15	60	10	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother-child relationship is affected due to less time spent with children	22	88	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marital and family problems	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bankers										
Increased financial cost	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety and security of children at care center	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time constraints	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother suffers stress related illnesses	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers have work related problems	16	64	9	36	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother-child relationship is affected due to less time spent with children	23	92	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marital and family problems	15	60	10	40	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1: Challenges of Working Mothers in Formal Sector Employment
Field Data 2021

Summary of table 1 shows that 22(88%) of teachers had challenges with times constraints, whereas 23(92%) of nurses had challenges with safety and security of children at care center. On the other hand, 23(92%) bankers were most challenged by mother child relationship affected due to less time spent with children. Majority (91%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the challenges presented, while only 26% agreed with the challenges. However, none of the respondents disagreed or was undecided on the challenges.

Challenges	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Traders										
Increased financial cost	22	88	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety and security of children at care center	19	76	6	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time constraints	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother suffers stress related illnesses	15	60	10	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers have work related problems	17	68	8	32	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother-child relationship is affected due to less time spent with children	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marital and family problems	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hairdressers										
Increased financial cost	23	92	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety and security of children at care center	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time constraints	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother suffers stress related illness	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers have work related problems	19	76	6	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother-child relationship is affected due to less time spent with children	22	88	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marital and family problems	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seamstresses										
Increased financial cost	22	88	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety and security of children at care center	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time constraints	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother suffers stress related illnesses	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers have work related problems	19	76	6	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mother-child relationship is affected due to less time spent with children	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marital and family problems	21	84	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Challenges of Working Mothers in Informal Sector Employment
Field Data 2021

From table 2, all 3 categories of respondents, such as traders 22(88%), hairdressers 23(92%) and seamstress 22(88%) were most challenged with increased financial cost. Collectively, 93% of respondents strongly agreed to the challenges as indicated, whereas 23% agreed to the challenges. No respondent disagreed or was undecided on the challenges of maternal and childcare.

Aspect of Childcare	Most Affected		Least Affected	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Teachers				
Breast feeding	8	32	17	68
Affection between mother and child	7	28	18	72
Inculcating family values	8	32	17	68
Eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods	16	64	9	36
Health of child	6	24	19	76
Nurses				
Breast feeding	6	24	19	76
Affection between mother and child	8	32	17	68
Inculcating family values	4	20	21	80
Eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods	15	60	10	40
Health of child	8	32	17	68
Bankers				
Breast feeding	6	24	19	76
Affection between mother and child	10	40	15	60
Inculcating family values	15	60	10	40
Eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods	20	80	5	20
Health of child	16	64	9	36
Traders				
Breast feeding	12	48	13	52
Affection between mother and child	8	32	17	68
Inculcating family values	10	40	15	60
Eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods	15	60	10	40
Health of child	9	36	16	64
Hairdressers				
Breast feeding	10	40	15	60
Affection between mother and child	9	36	16	64
Inculcating family values	10	40	15	60
Eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods	18	72	7	28
Health of child	8	32	17	68
Seamstresses				
Breast feeding	9	36	16	64
Affection between mother and child	9	36	16	64
Inculcating family values	8	32	17	68
Eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods	15	60	10	40
Health of child	8	32	17	68

Table 3: Extent to Which Mother's Work Affected Childcare
Field Data 2021

The results, from table 3, show that 68% of working indicated that eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods was mostly affected by their work, while 71% indicated that breast feeding, affection between mother and child and health of child were least affected by mothers work.

	Teachers		Nurses		Bankers		Traders		Hairdressers		Seamstresses	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Maternity leave	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0
Resigned after childbirth	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25
Changed work schedule	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0	25	0
Special work arrangement	0	25	0	25	25	0	0	25	0	25	0	25

Table 4: Coping Strategies of Working Mothers
Field Data 2021

Table 4 shows that 100% of working mothers enjoyed a form of maternity leave, neither did they resign from their jobs after nor did they have any special work arrangement after childbirth. Also 100% working mothers changed their work schedule after childbirth.

	Help from Husbands		Help from House Helps/Adults	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Teachers				
Bathe child	4	16	3	12
Feed child	5	20	2	8
Play with child	10	40	7	28
Send and pick child from care center	0	0	5	20
Dress Child	6	24	8	32
Nurses				
Bathe child	4	16	4	16
Feed child	3	12	6	24
Play with child	11	44	5	20
Send and pick child from care center	2	8	2	8
Dress Child	5	20	8	32
Bankers				
Bathe child	4	16	6	24
Feed child	4	16	2	8
Play with child	0	0	4	16
Send and pick child from care center	12	48	3	12
Dress Child	5	20	10	40
Traders				
Bathe child	2	8	3	12
Feed child	4	16	5	20
Play with child	6	24	5	20
Send and pick child from care center	9	36	4	16
Dress Child	4	16	8	32
Hairdressers				
Bathe child	3	12	6	24
Feed child	2	8	3	12
Play with child	7	28	2	8
Send and pick child from care center	4	16	5	20
Dress Child	9	36	9	36
Seamstress				
Bathe child	1	4	3	12
Feed child	1	4	6	24
Play with child	10	40	5	20
Send and pick child from care center	3	12	4	16
Dress Child	10	40	7	28

Table 5: Help for Working Mothers
Field Data 2021

Results, from table 4, show that working mothers receive some sort of help from their husbands and house helps/older siblings to cope with stresses of work and childcare.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1. Challenges of Working

The first section of the study aimed to get an understanding of the challenges working mothers face. Based on data collected, results were analysed on the challenges of working mothers in formal/informal sector and an extent to which mothers work affected childcare. Findings revealed working mothers experience challenges combining work and childcare responsibilities. Majority of teachers (88%) viewed time constraints (not having enough time for their children) as the challenge confronting them. As indicated by Pearce (2009), managing time is very important in the development of human lives and may influence the use of alternative childcare arrangement either positively or negatively. On the other hand, nurses' responses (92%) indicated safety and security of children at care center (care givers house), while bankers' responses (92%) showed that mother-child relationship was affected due to less time spent with children. This corroborates the findings of Bianchi and Robinson (1997) which state that there is considerable link between childcare arrangements and childhood development. Therefore, safety and security of a child at any childcare center and the effect of spending less time with one's child is very important for most working mothers. Many working mothers feel guilty about their decision to continue working whiles their babies are at a tender stage resulting in spending less time with them. Most working mothers often do not get enough sleep. According to Hittner (1998), sleep deficits are known to make women more susceptible to infectious illnesses. Working mothers are more vulnerable to stress-related illnesses than those who remain at home with their children because they have enough time to themselves (Facione, 1994).

Working mothers in the informal sector indicated cost as their greatest challenge. Traders (88%), hairdressers (92%) and seamstresses (88%) indicated increased financial cost as a challenge. These findings support Kestenbaum's (2004) summary on challenges confronting working mothers which includes time constraints, safety and security of children, financial issues and logistical problems. For working mothers in the informal sector income is not regular, thus the cost of an alternative childcare would be a challenge for them to deal with.

To make meaning of the challenges confronting, working mothers, who were respondents, rated how work affected childcare areas such as breast feeding, affection between mother and child, inculcating family values, eating routines and health concerns. Findings revealed that eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods were seriously affected by mothers' work. Over 90% of respondents indicated that work affected eating routines and the introduction of weaning foods because children are weaned when they are not supposed to be. However, breastfeeding and inculcation of family values were the least affected by the mothers' work. Logistical constraint is a challenge or an effect of work on childcare. It involves the coordination of activities in relation to work and childcare. Basic childcare is hindered because mothers spend less time at home and childcare is left in the hands of caregivers who may have different values from mothers (Delly & Gallant, 1993).

5.2. Coping Strategies

The second section of the research report presents the coping strategies employed by working mothers in the management of identified challenges related to maternal work and childcare. Respondents in the formal, which include teachers, nurses and bankers, indicated that their work ethics allowed them to apply for maternity leave after giving birth, while the informal workers, which include traders, hairdressers and seamstress, indicated that they did not actually take maternity leave because it was likely to decline their income, hence they frequently monitored their work from the house for the first few months usually between 0-3 months after giving birth. Similarly, all working mothers indicated that they never thought about resigning from their work, the reason being that they needed money to help cater for their children. All six categories of respondents indicated that they changed their work schedules. Teachers and nurses indicated that they worked out new time tables and shifts respectively after their maternity leave. Also, bankers said they worked half day for additional three months before resuming to normal work hours. Traders, hairdressers and seamstresses said for the first three months they worked from the house by giving out instructions to care takers of their shops. Biagioli (2003) stated that a way of reducing maternal employment and childcare stress is being self-employed because one has a controlled work schedule. Based on these results, it can be deduced that mothers in the informal sector, although did not officially take maternity leave, they equally enjoyed it because they stayed at home and worked by issuing out instructions to workers. The findings imply that mothers use alternative work arrangements as coping strategies. Biagioli (2003) indicated that alternative work schedules include working on shift hours and working on flexible times. As seen from the results, nurses and teachers adopted the shift work, while traders, hairdressers and seamstresses adopted working on flexible work hours. Furthermore, all respondents, except bankers, said they were not given special arrangement for work by their superiors or bosses after their maternity leave. Draznin (2004) explained that special work arrangements are used by mothers so that they can avoid the 'Mummy Turner Tag'. Having special work arrangement means they can equally work while still enjoying the benefit of a relaxed or flexible work schedule. These findings imply that all coping strategies employed by mothers were personal arrangements apart from mandatory maternity leaves enjoyed by government workers.

The study revealed that majority (60%) of teachers, nurses and bankers indicated that their husbands helped them out with childcare by playing with child/ children. About one-third of traders (36%) responded that their husbands sent/picked children from school, while 76% hairdressers and seamstress indicated that their husbands helped them by dressing up children. These findings support the assertion of Morgan (2005) that the contribution of husbands in home management releases nursing mothers from a lot of maternal stress which makes them happy and comfortable in their nursing situations. Working mothers need to involve husbands in childcare responsibilities to lessen the pressures of maternal work and childcare.

Again, majority of respondents (60%), with the exception of teachers and nurses, indicated that older children/ adults helped them out by dressing up children, sending and picking children from care centers and generally helped them out with childcare. However, teachers (40%) and nurses (44%) indicated that older children or adults played with their children. These findings also did not discriminate on the home management role played by adults/ older children. Most working mothers adopt an egalitarian approach to household work by allowing spouses and older siblings to participate in household work as indicated by Biagioli (2003), Anderson & Eamon (2004), Draznin (2004) and Strazdins *et al.*, (2004). Adopting an egalitarian approach to household work helps to lessen the stresses of maternal employment and childcare. Deacon and Firebaugh (1988) wrote that family roles and responsibilities have shifted from traditional to additive where women have also become co-bread winners to families. Therefore, there is the need for role change or adjustments to suit current developments.

5.3. A Summary of the Findings

- Time constraint was the challenge that confronted teachers. Nurses had challenges with safety and security, bankers had challenges with mother-child relationship and traders, hairdressers and seamstresses had challenges with finances or cost of alternative childcare.
- The areas of childcare, interrupted by mothers' work, were eating routines and time of introducing weaning foods while the areas least affected were breast feeding and inculcating family values to children.

- Working mothers adopted egalitarian approach in dealing with the challenges in childcare by involving husbands, adults and older children in household work and childcare.
- Respondents resorted to alternative work schedules as coping strategies after maternity leave. Nurses and teachers worked on shifts or alternating work hours and bankers worked half day for an additional three months after maternity leave.
- All respondents, except bankers, did not have special work arrangements after maternity leave.

6. Conclusion

The challenges of work and childcare, such as time constraints, cost of alternative childcare, safety and security of children and interruption in eating patterns of children, depict the influences of constraints and personal preferences of working mothers in decisions on the use of alternative childcare.

The various strategies adopted by working mothers to cope with and mitigate the challenges of work and childcare do not rule out the option of accessing and using alternative childcare. Hence, the use of alternative childcare is a coping strategy for working mothers.

7. Implications for Practice

The challenges of working and caring for children is enormous and stressful; therefore it is recommended that the government should put in place structures that will provide an effective child care arrangement for working mothers - both in the formal and informal sectors, to minimize the challenges that mothers face in taking care of their children aged 0-3years.

Since the coping strategies adopted by mothers include the use of alternative childcare, the mandatory three months maternity leave should be reviewed to six months maternity leave to offer working mothers enough time to care for their babies and think through the types of alternative childcare arrangements to use.

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