
WOMEN'S WORK AND CHILD CARE IN THE THIRD WORLD

Based on a review of literature dealing with childrearing practices, the following can be argued:

- Children, in whatever setting, have general physical, social and emotional needs that require responses from others.
- The specific ways in which these general needs manifest themselves and the childrearing practices adopted to meet these needs differ widely from place to place and from caregiver to caregiver, influenced by physical and social contexts, by beliefs, values and norms, by available technologies, and by the characteristics and knowledge of particular caregivers.
- In a rapidly changing world, it is difficult for cultures to adjust their norms and practices to fluctuating conditions. This results, more frequently than in the past, in beliefs, values, norms and practices that do not fit well with actual conditions. These can work against the sound rearing and development of children.
- Rapid change has produced both a move away from so-called traditional and family-centered practices and toward placing greater responsibility for childrearing in institutional settings outside the family. As these trends and specific changes in practices associated with them are judged, it is important not to equate “modern” with “good” and “traditional” with “outmoded” or “bad,” or vice versa. Rather, if we are to retain the good practices from traditional systems and to develop quality child care in response to the major changes thrust upon us by industrialization and so-called modernization, we will need to be much more systematic in our assessments and much more open to potential advantages of both the new and the old than we have been in the past.

Before entering directly into the review that substantiates this line of argument, and in a desire to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or promoting outmoded concepts, it is important to clarify three points. First, although the childrearing topic is set here within the general theme of “marriage and family,” it is important to recognize that a great deal of childrearing has always occurred outside the home and family in both formal and informal arrangements. It is common, for instance, for the larger community of which families are a part to play a significant role in raising children. (Ki-Zerbo 1990) This is not only the case for so-called “traditional” cultures but is increasingly common today as more and more children are being cared for during long periods of the day in specialized centers that are not family-run and have nothing to do with marriage ties. (Olmsted and Weikart 1994) In brief, while marital and family status certainly affect childrearing (and sometimes vice versa), so do many other factors. Thus, to consider childrearing only within the context of marriage and the family would be to limit both description and understanding of the process.

Second, because marriage and family activities tend to be associated with the reproductive role of women in society, it is important to stress that childrearing is an economically productive activity as well.

Women's activities are often classified as *productive* or *reproductive*. This classification is unfortunate in our view because it does not adequately represent the complexity of women's lives. Rather than distinguish these two roles, assigning economic value to one and not to the other, it seems more useful to place women's activities on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is work outside the home that is paid. This work, normally classified as *productive*, also supports *reproductive* activity. The next point on the continuum would be reserved for work that women do at home for which they earn money. Next comes support that women provide to other family members who are earning income (e.g., provision of food to those working outside the home), and production for family consumption (caring for small agricultural plots). Toward the other end of the continuum are such tasks as maintenance of the household (gathering firewood, collecting water, cooking, etc.) *and childcare*. If these household chores, normally classified as *reproductive*, were not performed by women as their duty to the family, they would have to be paid for, and if women did not care for children this service would also have to be bought, in which case the services would be classified as *productive* activities.

Ironically, when "childrearing" is redefined as "child care" because it occurs outside the home and/or is paid, it is recognized as an economically productive activity and is included in national accounts. However, when childrearing occurs in the home and is unpaid, it is not. But whether or not children are raised primarily in the home and whether or not a caregiver is paid, childrearing constitutes a productive as well as reproductive activity because it affects the ability of a child to make a productive contribution to the family and increases the child's chance of becoming productive in later life. Those who are involved in rearing children are performing a service to society that has economic as well as social value.

Third, childrearing is not, nor should it be seen as, an activity restricted to women. A growing literature shows fathering as well as mothering is important to the childrearing process (Engle, 1994, Lamb 1987), and that the absence of fathers can leave important areas of a child's development unattended (Zoller Booth 1995).

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