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child care needs of low income mothers

Final Report: A Synthesis of Recommendations from an International Conference, In-Country Workshops, and Research in Six Countries

December 1979

OVERSEAS EDUCATION FUND
of the League of Women Voters
2101 L Street, N.W. Suite 916
Washington, D.C. 20037

CHILD CARE NEEDS OF LOW INCOME MOTHERS IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

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THE PROJECT

Women throughout the world nurture and provide for their families. They must perform much hard labor to add to the family income and food supplies. Development programs have only recently started to look more carefully at the specific needs of women in the many roles they play.

The project "Child Care Needs of Low Income Mothers in Less Developed Countries" was undertaken with the following objectives:

a) to determine if child care is a serious constraint to women's participaton in income generating activities;

b) to examine the existing child care systems in selected countries; and

c) to suggest alternative child care programs and policy priorities for international assistance agencies.

It was to probe these issues and to develop strategies to meet the identified needs that, at the request of the Office of Nutrition, Agency for International Development (AID)*, the following activities were undertaken:

a) literature search and preparation of an annotated bibliography;

b) research in six countries, including household surveys, community group discussions, interviews with government and non-govermental policymakers and program planners. Country reports were prepared on Korea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Dominican Republic and Peru, as well as a summary report of the six countries;

c) in-country workshops in three countries (Korea, Sri Lanka and Peru) with national policymakers, program planners, and survey respondents;

d) international conference in October 1979, with 14 international participants from 8 countries, 16 representatives from AID and other U.S. agencies and 13 OEF board, staff and resource persons.

The view and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and should not be attributed to AID or any individual on its behalf.

The Child Care Project provided critical information and insights into the child care needs of women. The findings and recommendations point to the collaboration required between governments, non-governmental organizations, and international assistance agencies. This collaboration is necessary in order to strengthen and accelerate the contributions women are making in the development of their countries, and to address the needs women have for child care, skills training and employment opportunities.

A WEB OF DEPRIVATION

A web of deprivation characterizes family life in underdeveloped regions of the world. In particular, low income women are severely limited by the lack of job skills, lack of employment opportunities, and the responsibilities for care of their numerous children. In spite of these constraints, women seize any opportunity which enables them to earn desperately needed cash.

It is difficult for women to juggle domestic responsibilities with income-generating activities. In Brazil, women who once worked as maids find they are no longer welcome with children. The presence of infants under one year old keeps Sri Lankan women out of the labor force. Peruvian mothers turn to street commerce. On the one hand children restrict a woman's ability to be economically active, and on the other, the additional income is needed to feed the extra mouths.

For women working outside the home, it is very difficult to combine domestic and economic activities, and one follows the other, resulting in the all too familiar situation of a double work-day for women. Although work inside the home permits combining the dual roles to some extent, the work is seldom profitable enough to justify the trouble.

In all of the six countries researched, most of the women not currently working indicated that they would like to work, but they enumerated various constraints: lack of job skills and employment opportunities, and child care responsibilities. These needs are interrelated. There is no sense in skills training without a job waiting for the trained woman, and the major concern a woman has in accepting training or employment is, "Who will take care of my children?"

A child care program is thus a crucial component of development strategy. It can free women to take advantage of skills training and job opportunities, and thus improve family income. It can reduce infant and child mortality

and morbidity by providing adequate nutrition and medical attention. It can foster the cognitive development of children. It can facilitate nonformal education of the parents. It can be a focus for community organization and development.

The following recommendations are synthesized from those suggested by international participants at the October conference, as well as from the in-country meetings and the research. These recommendations are offered with the conviction that child care programs can help to break the vicious threads of the web of deprivation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. National and international assistance agencies should give due and explicit attention to meeting child care needs of women, children and families. These agencies should ensure appropriate distribution of assistance resources to this end.

National and international agencies typically see child care programs as an expense rather than an investment. Those most in need, mothers and children, are least able to demand programs to meet their needs. A child care program is an investment in development. It can enable children to obtain educational and nutritional growth, as well as strengthen the family's child-rearing skills. It can permit mothers to engage in income generation and community activities.

International assistance for child care could include support of:

a) financial and technical assistance to non-governmental and governmental child care programs;

b) training of child development specialists, paraprofessionals, program managers, community leaders, etc., in early childhood development and nutrition, and program management;

c) demonstration projects;

d) "seed" money, credit programs, and grants to women's and community organizations, skills training and income generation projects, with a child care component;

e) national and international seminars, conferences, newsletters and other forms of exchange;

f) experimentation and production of materials for child care, including pre-school education, nutrition and adult skills training; and

g) further research in child care, early childhood education, and female labor force participation.

2. Family support services, such as child care, should be decentralized, destandardized and flexible. They should be community-and parent-controlled, and draw on local human and material resources to the greatest extent possible.

In all surveys, the in-country workshops and the international conference, the need for community self-reliance was voiced strongly. "A child care program cannot succeed without very good participation of the community," one participant stated as the group's consensus.

The control that families expect to have over their children is reflected in this desire for community-based centers or extended family care. They see the caretaker, whoever it might be, as an extension of their role as parents.

The "ideal" child care program is one which a community has organized by its own initiative, relying on local resources. But communities have many concerns and limited resources. Where child care programs are initiated and supported by a group from outside the immediate area, it is essential to build community involvement into the project design.

3. Child care programs should include comprehensive, integrating components of:
   a) nutrition, disease prevention;
   b) early childhood education, socialization; and
   c) training for family members in child-rearing, nutrition, family planning.

The extent of malnutrition in the children of developing countries strongly indicates a need for arrangements which provide adequate nutrition supplementation. Child care programs offer the opportunity to teach mothers, siblings and other family members the elements of good nutrition.

Parents feel the greatest advantage of child care facilities is the pre-school education opportunity. They recognize that intellectual stimulation is not usually available at home for their children while in the care of older siblings or other family members. Child care programs can involve parents in the learning process, and thus have home outreach also, for information on child development, health, and family planning.

4. Alternative child care programs should be developed to meet specific needs identifed by parents and the community, such as:
   a) full day care,
   b) seasonal care in rural areas,
   c) half-day care,
   d) industry-based child care facilities,
   e) temporary care for children of women in skills training programs,
   f) neighborhood home-based care,
   g) housing complex centers, and
   h) drop-in care (occasional care when needed).

The international conference participants and national leaders of in-country meetings sought alternatives to meet the disparate needs of women in their countries. Flexibility was a key concern: "We should not focus only on the day care center approach and inflexible standards." Child care policies should encourage adaptation to local customs and conditions.

Community-based child care was preferred because of the element of familiarity and community control. Industrial care was less desired because of the difficulty and expense of bringing children to work sites and possibly unsafe environments. While community care is the desired arrangement for children who have been weaned, industrial day care may be more appropriate for infants in order to encourage breastfeeding among working mothers.

The surveys found that not only are less than 1% of the children reached by organized child care facilities, but those who are cared for by such facilities are typically not the children of low income families. The fees charged by a child care facility, the cost of transportation, supplies and clothing make such a facility out of the financial reach of most low income families.

The hours some child care facilities operate also limit their usefulness to working women. Unless a center is intended specifically for use by working women, and many are not, the hours they are open are often not sufficient to

allow women to leave their children, travel to work, work a full shift, and return for the children. Alternatives should be explored to meet varying needs.

5. Child care programs should be developed to meet the needs of priority population groups:
   a) children of women who currently work outside the home,
   b) children of women who are heads of households,
   c) malnourished children,
   d) children 3-5 years of age,
   e) children residing in the low income urban periphery, and
   f) children in rural areas.

It is recognized that even with attention to priorities, the number of children who can be reached with present resources is small compared to the number of those in need. Yet the task must begin...

Women who currently work outside the home, and/or are heads of households, are usually in greater need of child care services than women who are not employed, or are employed inside the home. Malnourished children should be given priority attention.

In "either/or" situations, families prefer to send children 3-5 years of age to child care centers rather than children 0-3. This is because parents give high value to activities preparing children for entering the formal school system.

The children residing in the low income urban periphery should have priority, since they are more likely to need such attention. Urban mothers are more able to find income generating activities outside the home and in occupations incompatible with caring for one's own children, than are mothers in rural areas. Nevertheless, rural children need special consideration since they have little access to health and school facilities.

6. Vocational training should be provided for women in skills needed for current and projected work opportunities. Training and employment opportunities should be disseminated through a variety of information networks. Legislation and policies governing the participation of women in the labor force should be reviewed to determine if women's needs are being addressed.

Women migrate to cities to find work, but lacking both saleable skills and access to information on job opportunities, they are generally unsuccessful in finding work that improves their situation. They turn to domestic work or self-employment, producing services or goods that are difficult to sell in an already glutted market.

In all six of the countries researched, the labor force participation rate of the survey sample of low income women was considerably higher than the official national rate for women. The surveyed women work because their families desperately need cash income. Many of the interviewed women who do not work said they want to engage in some income generating activity.

Low income women are almost entirely omitted from job training programs. Activities directed to women are usually limited to sewing, embroidering and knitting, even in countries with labor shortages. There is a great need for skills training to enable women to compete for new, non-traditional occupations. A comprehensive training program might involve the establishment of:

a) neighborhood training centers,
b) incentives for businesses to include women in training and hiring,
c) literacy and human development training,
d) training for women in cooperatives, small enterprises and other marketing ventures, and
e) child care centers at training centers.

Employment referral and job placement centers could be created to widen the information base for those seeking employment. These networks and the media should promote attitudinal changes and encourage women to enter non-traditional fields of work. Educational campaigns are necessary to inform women of their benefits and rights as employees, as well as their responsibilities.

The simple availability of training and job openings does not assure that a) women will be able to take advantage of such openings, or b) that these jobs represent real opportunities to earn enough money or make a substantial contribution to the family well-being.

Legislation (and its enforcement) is necessary to assure nondiscriminatory wages, maternity leave, and other benefits of equal treatment for women workers. Since strict enforcement of laws, with penalties for offenders, is sometimes not feasible or unrealistic, emphasis should be on offering incentives to businesses which voluntarily provide these services and benefits. Monetary support and technical assistance may be funnelled through labor unions, private organizations, business associations, and government agencies. Businesses may be encouraged to provide social benefits to employees through recognition and reward.

7. Child care, vocational training and employment generation are important activities of community organizations. These activities and organizations should be encouraged.

The degree of women's participation in community activities varies greatly worldwide and depends on numerous factors. The level of national economic development, cultural attitudes toward the roles women play, social structure, literacy rate, traditional leadership patterns, the attitudes of men and women themselves, all affect what women do inside and outside the home.

Community organizations are usually led by men and address the issues men want resolved. Women's participation is frequently not encouraged, and the concerns of women are thus not addressed. Women should be encouraged to participate in the leadership and decision-making of community groups. Participatory skills training should be given to women in order to strengthen their participation in community associations.

CONCLUSION

Women are a missing link in most economic and social development programs in the Third World today. Child care programs facilitate the incorporation of women into the development process because they free women to take advantage of new opportunities. They also provide opportunities for children to receive early childhood education and nutrition supplementation. They can be a focus of community development.

Child care programs should be integrated with components of nutrition, health, education, parent involvement and community participation. Child care projects should be incorporated into other development programs.

Mothers' needs for child care, vocational training and economic improvement opportunities are articulated across national borders and cultural differences. It is imperative that more individuals and institutions be aware of these needs and that the commitment be made to respond to them. The efforts of the research teams and the participants at the workshops and the international conference, are steps toward building this awareness. It is the hope of all who participated in this project that other persons, organizations, governments and international assistance agencies will join in recognizing these needs and will take the next steps to provide child care programs for low income women.

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CONFERENCE - WORKSHOP ON

CHILD CARE NEEDS OF LOW INCOME MOTHERS

IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

October 1-5, 1979
Washington, D.C.

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PUBLICATIONS

The publications resulting from this project include:

a) Annotated Bibliography on Child Care Needs of Low Income Women in Less Developed Countries

b) Child Care Needs of Low Income Women in Urban Malaysia

c) Child Care in Urban and Rural Peru

d) The Over-Burdened Women: Women's Work and Child Care in the Dominican Republic

e) Child Care Needs of Low Income Women: Urban Brazil

f) Child Care Needs of Low Income Women in Rural and Urban Sri Lanka

g) Child Care Needs of Urban and Rural Kore

h) Child Care Needs of Low Income Mothers in Less Developed Countries: A Summary Report of Research in Six Countries of Asia and Latin America

i) Final Report: A Synthesis of Recommendations from an International Conference, In-Country Workshops, and Research in Six Countries

A slide presentation has also been prepared on the project theme.

These publications and the slide presentation are available from the Overseas Education Fund, 2101 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20037, 202/466-3430.