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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Research Service

SOME MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EXPENDITURES OF EMPLOYED WIVES

Talk by Emma G. Holmes  
Consumer and Food Economics Research Division  
at the 40th Annual Agricultural Outlook Conference  
Washington, D.C., 3:30 P.M., Thursday, November 15, 1962

Three out of every 5 of the 24 million women in the U.S. labor force in March 1961 were married women living with their husbands. Since the majority of couples maintain their own households, we can assume that most of these wives were homemakers as well as paid employees--in other words, they were carrying two jobs at once. Three recent studies of the Consumer and Food Economics Division were directed toward learning some of the effects of this dual job-holding of wives on home management and household production practices, as well as on the money incomes of families.

Four years ago, I gave you a preliminary report of a study of job-related expenditures and management practices of gainfully employed wives in four Georgia cities. Since then we have done similar studies in Ohio and North Carolina, in which we included rural as well as city families. The former was in cooperation with the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, the latter under contract with the Research Triangle Institute. It is these I will report on today, giving first some of the findings from the Ohio study then a few from the North Carolina study for comparison.

The Ohio Study

In Ohio, the city families we interviewed were representative of families living in Zanesville, a place of about 40,000 population in the east central part of the State. The rural families were representative of the open country families of four counties--the one in which Zanesville is located and three adjacent to it.

We interviewed approximately as many nonemployed as employed wives, so comparisons could be made. A woman was considered "employed" if she worked in a paying job for 1,000 or more hours during the year ending April 30, 1960, and "nonemployed" if she worked less than 81 hours. All the wives were under 55 years old, had households of not more than six members, and had husbands who worked full time--or approximately so--that year.

A majority of the employed women worked either in clerical or sales positions or as operatives in potteries and factories. Fifteen percent were in professional or managerial occupations, and about that many in service occupations such as nurses' aides, waitresses, and domestics. Their average earnings, before deductions, were about \$2,850 in both city and country. Individual women earned amounts ranging from less than \$1,000 to \$6,800 among rural and up to \$8,100 among city women.

Our primary interest in the study was to learn how much of the working wife's income was used for expenses related to her job-holding. In getting this information we also obtained some about the management and use of the rest of her earnings, and about the management of household tasks.

The considerable portion of the wife's income that goes for income taxes, social security and other retirement plans, and union dues, of course, require little or no management on her part because they are deducted from her pay or have to be paid in specified amounts. Another group of job-related expenses gives her somewhat more latitude for making her own decisions. Transportation, for example, may be a necessary expense, but she may have a choice between a more and a less expensive way of providing it. When she decides the family has to have a second car so she can get to work, for example, she is choosing one of the more expensive ways. In Ohio about 5 percent of the employed wives in both city and country said their working made it necessary to have an additional car. A few others had a second car for the wife's use, but admitted this was a matter of choice rather than necessity.

But these wives driving their own cars to work were a small part of the total number using transportation. At the other extreme, as far as expense was concerned, were those who rode with their husbands or other family members on their way to and from work. If no extra mileage was involved, this type of transportation was not considered an item of expense to the wife. Expense for travel was recorded for 75 percent of the city and 85 percent of the open country wives, in amounts varying from a few dollars to several hundred. The average expense was considerably higher for rural than for city wives, because of the longer distances they had to travel to their work. It was this item that made the net incomes of the rural women a little less, percentagewise, than those of the city women.

Another job-related expense that the woman may be able to control is that for lunches and snacks at work. About half of both the city and rural women bought some meals or food to supplement packed lunches at work during the year. We can assume that the others decided to avoid this expense by going home for lunch or eating only food carried from home, except for the few whose employers provided them with lunches without charge. The city wives who bought lunches at work spent for them an average of \$136 for the year, the rural wives a little less--\$118. More rural women refrained from buying between-meal snacks; a little more than a third of them, as compared with half of the city women reporting this expense. All together, three-fourths of the city and two-thirds of the country women had some expense for food at work.

Other items of expense that were considered job-related and usually involved smaller amounts of money included special work clothing; business and professional dues, meetings, and publications; employee parties; gifts and flowers for fellow employees; and educational and medical expenses incurred in connection with the job.



We asked the employed women how they handled the money left after paying the expenses connected with their jobs. Out of every 10 wives, 7 said they pooled all of their earnings with their husbands', 2 handled it all separately, and 1 pooled part and handled part separately. The younger wives were more likely to pool their earnings than the older ones--perhaps because the pressure on family income to provide the necessities of living was greater in the growing families of the younger women. Another indication of this pressure came in the responses to questioning about how the women used the unpooled portion of their earnings. Some wives mentioned several uses, most of which had to do with helping with current family expenses. About one-fourth of the answers they gave related to providing furnishings, equipment, or other improvements for the homes; one-fourth to helping with general living expenses or buying things for the children; and a fourth to providing for the wife's own personal needs. One-fourth of the replies were divided about equally between paying debts and saving.

That so many of the employed wives pooled their earnings in the general family purse and so large a part of their unpooled earnings was used for family living seems consistent with the answers given to the question, "Why are you working?" These indicated that the decision to hold a paying job was based in most cases on the desire for more money than the husbands' incomes provided. More than four out of five of the replies were of this nature. Those who were working because they liked to, wanted to use their special training, or felt a need to keep busy were in the minority.

Regardless of whether they pooled their income and spent from the pooled fund or kept it separate, the employed wives used some of their earnings to upgrade their wardrobes. Wives at every level of income, based on the husband's earnings alone, spent more for clothing for general wear and for personal care when they were gainfully employed. Some of the additional expenditure was undoubtedly necessary to permit the wife to appear neat and suitably dressed on the job. And some of it, I am quite sure, was made to satisfy her desire for more or better clothing than she would have felt she could buy if her family had been depending entirely on her husband's income. Perhaps her earnings had increased the sum available for living enough to ease the strain somewhat, and the fact that she had contributed to this sum made the wife feel more free to spend for her personal use.

Clothing and personal care expenditures of working wives were somewhat higher than those of full-time homemakers, also, in families with total family income (husband's plus wife's earnings) in the same range. The single exception was the lower income city families (\$3,000-\$4,999), where employed and nonemployed spent about the same amount. In general, the city wives spent more for clothing than the open country wives in the same income and employment status group.

Another way some employed wives chose to use part of their earnings was for hiring some of their homemaking tasks done. For the working woman who has preschool children this is usually a necessity rather than a choice, because care must be provided for the children and this doesn't often come free. The mother may have a choice as to the type of care, however--for example, whether it will be provided in the child's home or away--and as to the amount she will pay for it. In Ohio, more mothers provided care at home than away from home.

We questioned the wives about their use of paid service for laundry work, general housework, and sewing, as well as child care. In the families with preschool children, 80 percent of the employed wives in the city and about 90 percent in the country reported some expenditures for such services. In families with school-age children (6-17) only, about half of the working mothers had some paid service, and in the all-adult families 50 percent in the city, but only 38 percent in the country did. The proportions of non-employed wives reporting paid help were much smaller, especially in the country.

We used expenditures for service to measure the amount of service bought, and found these considerably higher when wives were employed. The employed-wife families reporting any help averaged about \$450 when there were children under 6, something less than \$200 when they had older children (6-17) only, and nearer \$100 in all-adult households. These expenditures apply roughly to both city and country families, though the country expenditures tended slightly lower than the city except in households with preschool children. The nonemployed-wife families who reported paid help spent much less for it.

In the employed-wife families with preschool children, of course, many more had help for child care than for the other tasks they were questioned about. The other types of households, on the whole, had help with laundry work at home or in commercial laundries, more than general housework. Few hired any help to do sewing.

In the calculations of job-related expenses and net income, the additional amounts spent by employed wives for clothing and personal care and paid service, above those spent by the nonemployed, were counted as "extra" expenses due to the wife's job-holding. The "extra" expense for clothing and personal care amounted to 5 or 6 percent of the wife's earnings in the all-adult families and 2 to 3 percent in the others. (See table.) "Extra" for paid service took about 1 percent for the all-adult families, 3 percent for those with older children only, and 13 to 15 percent for the employed mothers of preschool children.

After the job-related expenses were subtracted from their earnings, the net amount left to the wives with all-adult households or households with adults and older children only was a little more than 60 percent of the total in the city and a little less than 60 percent in the open country. Net for the mothers of preschool children was nearer half of the total amount paid them by their employers.

Another phase of money management studied was use of credit. We asked the families about consumer installment debts paid on and assumed during the year--including those for automobiles, other consumer goods and services, and cash loans. Previous studies have shown that use of credit differs among age groups, so we tabulated the answers to these questions by age of wife. The proportion of employed- and nonemployed-wife families reporting payments was about the same within each age group except the oldest rural one, where it was considerably higher for those with employed wives. There was a difference in the amounts paid on installment debts, however. The families with working wives made larger total payments during the year than those



with full-time homemakers in each age group. They averaged only \$58 more in the oldest city group, but from \$110 to \$175 more in the others. These latter amounts meant 25 to 43 percent higher payments than the nonemployed wives reported. In the city, more families of employed wives reported payments on cars but not on other consumer goods. In the country it was the other way around--more paying on other consumer goods, but not on cars.

As for installment debts assumed, differences were about the same as described for debts paid--that is, little difference in the tendency of families to assume debts, but larger debts when the wife was employed. Here the exception was the young rural families, where those with employed wives added less to their installment debt during the year than those with nonemployed wives.

Information was obtained about two important functions of homemakers--feeding the family and sewing. We didn't try to get a complete story here, because we didn't want our schedule to be too long. But we did get enough to give some idea whether the employed wives were turning these jobs over to commercial facilities more than the nonemployed.

The questions asked about meal preparation and purchase applied to the week preceding the interview. Except in the few cases where the family was on vacation, some meals were prepared in every home. Out of a possible 21 meals, an average of about 18 were prepared and served in homes of employed wives, and 20 in homes of nonemployed wives that week. The smaller number of meals served in nonemployed-wife homes was accounted for largely by the smaller number of noon meals in all-adult households. These were mostly two-person households, and frequently both members--husband and wife--ate their lunches at work so there was no one home to get a meal for.

In addition to meals at home, some packed lunches were prepared in many homes for a family member to eat at work or school. More employed than non-employed wives reported these (71 and 56 percent, respectively, in the country, somewhat less in the city).

Not all of the meals at home were prepared by the homemaker, of course. More than a third of the employed mothers of preschool children reported meal preparation by paid workers, but few of the other women had this kind of help. Help was more likely to come from family members, who sometimes took over the job of getting entire meals, sometimes just assisted the homemaker. About half of the employed wives and a fifth of the nonemployed received a helping hand from other family members that week. The working mothers with children 6 to 17 years old were luckiest in this way, for 77 percent of them in the city and 62 percent in the country reported such help. This was about three times the proportion of nonemployed mothers reporting family help with meals in the city, and two times the proportion in the country. There were indications that more husbands helped with meals when the wives worked, too.

Husbands were somewhat more likely to buy lunches at work when the wife was employed, but the difference wasn't great. As for other meals out--the evening meals and Sunday dinners we might expect employed-wife families to be eating in restaurants to save the wife's time and energy--as many nonemployed as employed rural wives reported them (13 percent).

In the city, however, more of the employed-wife families bought and ate these meals away from home (19 as compared with 13 percent). Families with only two members were the ones most likely to "eat out." The rural families who bought meals out spent about 20 percent more for them when the wife was employed (\$5.24 as compared with \$4.28), but the average expenditure was about the same for both city groups.

Data about purchase of lunches at school during the schedule year show that in the city more of the working mothers reported this practice. Seventy-one percent of those with school-age children reported their children bought lunches, compared with 53 percent of the nonemployed. Average expenditures for the year were \$82 and \$60 per family, respectively. In the country about four-fifths of each group bought school lunches, spending an average of about \$80 per family.

Home baking.--Not as many employed as nonemployed wives did home baking the week before the interview, either "from scratch" or with mixes, but differences were not as great as one might expect. In the city 62 percent of the employed and 74 percent of those not employed baked one or more of eight listed foods. In the country, the corresponding figures were about 75 and 85 percent. The biggest difference was noted in the two-person city families, where only 44 percent did baking when employed, but 70 percent when full-time homemakers. The quantity of baking done by the home bakers, as measured by the number of batches of baked foods produced, was slightly smaller when the wife worked.

There was little evidence that the employed wives used packaged mixes for baking much more than the nonemployed. Of the families who baked that 1 week, about as large a proportion of one group as the other reported using one or more mixes. About three-fourths of the cakes were made from mixes, except in the rural homes with nonemployed wives where three-fifths were. Pies were seldom made from mixes.

More nonemployed than employed wives reported doing home sewing. The percentages responding "yes" to the question "Did you do any home sewing other than mending last year?" were 30 for employed and 40 for nonemployed in the city, and 40 and 51 for the corresponding groups in the country. The ones most likely to do home sewing were the farm wives, especially those with families of five or six. The wives who did sew made more garments, on the average, when they were full-time homemakers, also, except in two-person households.

### The North Carolina Study

I haven't studied all the North Carolina data yet, but as a matter of interest will mention a few similarities and differences I have noticed in comparing portions of it with Ohio.



The city families in North Carolina lived in Gastonia, a textile center of about 40,000 in the south western part of the State, and the rural families in three adjacent counties. The employed wives worked mainly as operatives in the textile mills. They earned an average of about \$2,600 in 1960, which was about \$250 less than the average for the Ohio wives.

As in Ohio, the employed wives spent more for clothing than the non-employed in a given income group. In fact, the North Carolina wives, employed and nonemployed, spent about the same average amounts for clothing as the Ohio wives. This seemed surprising, in view of the milder climate, the somewhat lower incomes, and the larger number of the North Carolina wives wearing special work garments instead of street clothing on their jobs.

The pattern noted in Ohio, of more wives with paid help and larger expenditures for this help in employed- than nonemployed- wife homes, showed up again in North Carolina. But more North Carolina than Ohio wives had paid help, whether employed or not, urban or rural, except the working mothers of preschool children, who were pretty evenly matched. Many more of the southern than the northern wives had paid service for laundry work. The southern homemakers were about as likely to have this work done in their homes as elsewhere, but in Ohio more of them sent it out.

Differences in the use of consumer credit were less well-defined than in Ohio. In the city, more employed than nonemployed wives reported payments on installment debts in the two older groups, but not in the youngest, where they were the same. In the country, more employed-wife families in the middle age group only (30-39) made installment payments. The Ohio pattern of larger payments on installment debt by the employed-wife debtors held for all age groups in rural North Carolina, but only the youngest urban group.

In North Carolina as in Ohio, the average number of meals prepared and served in the home during a week was smaller for employed than nonemployed-wife families (18 and 20 out of a possible 21, respectively), largely because of the smaller number of noon meals in all-adult households. In North Carolina, also, about as many employed as nonemployed did home baking--in fact, practically all of the wives baked. But packaged mixes were less popular with the Southern homemakers, regardless of their employment status, for not nearly as large a proportion used them as in Ohio. More of the working wives used mixes in the country, but in the city more of the nonemployed wives used them, except in the low-income group.

As in Ohio, a smaller proportion of women did home sewing when they were job-holders. In the city, 37 percent of the employed and 47 percent of the nonemployed sewed in 1960. In the country, 41 percent and 58 percent, respectively, did. All of these figures are a little higher than the ones for Ohio.

The outlook is for increasing numbers of wives in the labor force in the years ahead. If other working wives adjust to the dual job of homemaking and earning as these in Ohio and North Carolina did, there seems little danger that increased employment will result to any great extent in the delegation of meal preparation to restaurant cooks, washing and ironing to commercial laundries, and housework to hired workers. Many of the wives studied managed to do all these home tasks without outside help, as well as holding a job.

Average gross and net income and job-related expenses of employed wives; percentage expenses and net income were of gross earnings, by family type and place of residence, Ohio 1960-61

Item	Urban					Rural				
	All families	All-adult	With children 6-17 only	With children under 6	All families	All-adult	With children 6-17 only	With children under 6	Dollars	Dollars
Husband's income (after tax) .....	4,633	4,730	4,684	4,376	4,388	4,204	4,642	4,051		
Wife's income (before tax) .....	2,869	2,916	2,952	2,629	2,854	2,820	2,923	2,729		
Job-related expenses:										
Income taxes .....	560	596	571	479	500	521	502	450		
Other .....	318	318	320	313	502	460	543	473		
Extra for paid help ....	121	39	90	330	116	25	84	413		
Extra for clothing and personal care .....	128	169	72	78	100	143	80	51		
Total .....	1,127	1,122	1,053	1,200	1,218	1,149	1,209	1,387		
Net .....	1,742	1,794	1,899	1,429	1,636	1,671	1,714	1,342		
Wife's income (before tax) .....	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Job-related expenses:	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Income taxes .....	19.5	20.4	19.3	18.2	17.5	18.5	17.2	16.5		
Other .....	11.0	10.9	10.8	11.9	17.6	16.3	18.6	17.3		
Extra for paid help ....	4.2	1.3	3.0	12.6	4.1	.9	2.9	15.1		
Extra for clothing and personal care .....	4.5	5.8	2.4	3.0	3.5	5.1	2.7	1.9		
Net .....	60.7	61.5	64.3	54.4	57.3	59.3	58.6	49.2		
Families	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
	184	65	79	40	199	71	95	33		