

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL
E/CN.6/WG.57
21 March 1958
Original: FRENCH



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Twelfth session
Agenda item 6(a)

Dual Distribution

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN
a) REPORT ON WORKING WOMEN, INCLUDING WORKING MOTHERS,
WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Statement submitted by the International Catholic Child Bureau,
a non-governmental organization in category B consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following statement which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 28 and 29 of Economic and Social Council Resolution 288 B (I):

Dated: 17 March 1958

Received: 20 March 1958

I. The statement which the INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU has the honour to submit herewith relates to item 6 of the provisional agenda for the present session, and particularly to item 6(a), dealing with working women, including working mothers, with family responsibilities. Discussion of this agenda item is based on a report by the Secretary-General published on 28 January 1958 (E/CN.6/324).

II. The observations of the INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU deal mainly with the effects on the child of work by the mother outside the home. Examination of the above-mentioned report by the Secretary-General shows that the following views have been expressed on this matter:

- Paragraphs 61-62 (16 lines of the report): the views of organizations which stress the harmful effects of work by the mother on the mental and physical health and on the psychological development of the child.

- Paragraphs 63-67 (67 lines of the report): the views of organizations which believe that work by the mother outside the home, so far from having a bad effect on the child, definitely promotes the child's harmonious development.

- Paragraphs 68-88 (10 pages of the report): these paragraphs deal with means for training mothers in how best they can use the time which they can spend at home, and discuss the best substitutes for the mother's care of the child while she is working outside the home.

The main idea emerging from this report is that work by the mother outside the home is not only an undeniable fact, but one which undoubtedly has a very favourable effect on the development of the child, and that the best way of looking after the child during the mother's absence is to entrust him to a day nursery or kindergarten, which would moreover be able to bring up and educate a small child much better than the family itself.

III. The INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU is astonished by this conclusion. The arguments advanced by those organizations which maintain that work by the mother outside the home has no harmful effect on the child's development, but that on the contrary such separation can only have very beneficial results, are far from convincing. They are simply gratuitous statements which are in conflict with the conclusions emerging from various careful studies of the matter.

The "Pre-school Education" Committee of the INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU, which works in co-operation with more than forty countries in every part of the world, gave detailed attention to this question at its last meeting in Freiburg-in-Breisgau (Germany) from 3 to 6 January 1958. The conclusions of this Committee, based on an international enquiry, indicate that there is no substitute for the mother in looking after her children. They make it equally clear that day nurseries and kindergartens are in general nothing more than a makeshift, whose functions are purely complementary, and that the role of the family is fundamental in the up-bringing and education of children.

It is impossible to give all these conclusions in detail in the present statement, but they are available to the Commission.

IV. The conclusions arising from the opinions presented in the report of the Secretary-General are equally in conflict with the findings of serious studies conducted by the Secretariat-General of the United Nations, the International Child Centre and the World Health Organization in the same field. It is sufficient to quote here some particularly convincing passages from studies published by these three organizations:

(a) Influence of the mother on the mental health, character and psychological development of the child:

"Except in the worst cases, a mother gives her child food and shelter, comforting him in distress, teaching him simple skills, and above all is providing him with that continuity of human care on which his sense of security rests. He may be ill-fed and ill-sheltered, he may be very dirty and suffering from disease, he may be ill-treated, but, unless his parents have wholly rejected him, he is secure in the knowledge that there is someone to whom he is of value It is against this background that the reason why children thrive better in bad homes than in good institutions can be understood". (J. Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, WHO, 1952, page 68).

(b) Effects of day nurseries:

"Such organizations, however good they may be in a general way, cannot provide any permanent answer to the needs of children for security and the warmth of affection The child becomes indifferent to changes in staff and, to the inexperienced observer, he seems happy and well adapted to his surroundings.

"Observation of such children indicates that the apparently successful adaptation is deceptive and profoundly abnormal, that it is only a negative reaction to the need for maternal care It has been proved that this type of reaction, even if of short duration, can have permanent consequences. If the deprivation of maternal care is prolonged, this reaction can produce permanent traits of character and can make it impossible for the child to establish positive ties of affection in later life". (United Nations study on "Day-care Services for Children", prepared at the request of the Social Commission and published in the "International Social Service Review", No. 1, January, 1956, pp. 140-141).

"As a social service, day care may be one way to mitigate the effects of deprivation While recognizing the potentiality of preventive and positive values of day care, many experts in child development stress the serious hazards to the child's healthy growth when deprived of normal home care for long hours". (ibid. p.19).

V - THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU believes that the ideal solution would be to recognize the undoubted economic value to society of work by the mother in her own home, and that it would be appropriate to compensate for the loss of earnings to the mother who does not work outside the home by a system of family allowances and by a family bonus added to the wages of a working father.

This solution has been applied with great success in a number of countries, particularly in France where, as is generally known, the system of family allowances and a special allowance for the mother who remains at home is very highly developed, so that many mothers can devote themselves to their task of bringing up and caring for their children.

It is true that there are a number of cases where the mother (a widow, a divorcee, a woman deserted by her husband or an unmarried mother) is obliged to go out to work. But in these cases the unity of the home has already been destroyed, and the mother's work is clearly the only means of subsistence for the household.

The effects of such circumstances on the healthy and harmonious development of the child are too well known to be emphasized here.

VI - To conclude this statement, we would like to insist particularly that the advantages for the harmonious development of the mother which are alleged to arise from her working outside the home (paragraphs 63 - 67 of the report of the Secretary-General) are very often only hypothetical in value.

In very many cases it seems that those who advance this theory have never been responsible for a home where the mother is obliged to work, and have never personally experienced the daily realities of a situation where mothers must lead a double life, at work and in the home. Further, those who hold this theory have certainly never had memories of a childhood spent in homes where the mother went out to work, memories haunted since the very earliest years by the sight of their mother struggling perpetually with an impossible daily programme of work which obliged her to fulfil each day the functions of two very busy persons - the mother and the worker.