

## SOCIOLOGY

# Millions of Working Mamas

More and more women—mothers and even grandmothers—are doing useful jobs in America today. They constitute one-third to one-half of the working women.

By MARTHA G. MORROW

► MILLIONS OF MAMAS—and even grandmamas—go to work every day in the United States. One-third to one-half of the working women are mothers and grandmothers.

About nine million mothers with children under 18 years of age this year will work at jobs ranging from saleswoman to beautician, bus driver to teacher. Hundreds of thousands more in the North and South, East and West, will resume careers interrupted by the birth of a baby or will begin work for the first time.

About six times as many mothers will work this year as worked two decades ago. Almost five million more mothers will work in 1964 than worked in 1950, if the present trend continues. In addition millions of grandmothers will hold jobs.

## Have Children Under 18

More than one-third of the women working in 1964 will have children under 18 years of age. But almost three-fourths of the working mothers living with their husbands will work only part of the day or part of the year. In contrast, possibly half of the grandmothers will hold full-time, year-round jobs.

These working mothers and grandmothers will hold better paying and more interesting jobs than ever before, if they take advantage of the opportunities being opened up to them. President Johnson's push for more high level jobs for women, spearheaded by more top-flight positions for women in Government, will mean better pay for women all along the line.

A working mother who is accelerating the Government's drive to help raise the status of women is Assistant Secretary of Labor Esther Peterson.

"A real challenge is being offered women who wish to take advantage of the new job vistas opening up," she says. "Many of these jobs are waiting to be created by women with compassion, concern and a desire to serve their fellowmen."

## Advice to Working Mothers

Mrs. Peterson has this advice to give to mature women seeking jobs:

"Do not take the first job offered unless it is one that will interest you, for which you are equipped and which offers a future.

"Sharpen your own knowledge and skills for the better opportunities, then take time to explore the openings available.

"Do not let your abilities go to waste by settling for an easy job: the nation needs all the brainpower it can get."

Definite problems face the reemployment of mature women and those seeking employment for the first time. Some need retraining to recover skills and technical knowledge lost through lack of use. Others do not have the education or previous experience needed to hold a job.

Wise mothers take stock of what they have to offer and bring their skills up to date while still full-time homemakers.

Sometimes volunteer work lays the basis for interesting careers in television, writing and organizing; occasionally a hobby can be developed into a lucrative business. Part-time study can lead to a new, exciting career.

## Education Important

Education is the key to better jobs. Statistics show that among women who received some money income in 1961, those with five or more years of college earned almost five times as much as those who graduated from elementary school but had no high school training. They received more than twice as much as those with only a high school degree, and one and a half times as much as college graduates with no graduate study.

There are still far too few vocational schools or colleges available locally. How-

ever, women today have a much greater opportunity to continue their education than did their mothers. Numerous good courses, many for degree credit, are available by mail, radio and TV.

Many new community colleges are being founded. Long-established colleges are offering courses for credit at centers hundreds and even thousands of miles away. Telescoped and speed-up courses enable a mature college graduate to complete specialized training in record time or on a part-time basis.

## Problems Examined

A chance to examine the problems of employed women is being offered at conferences set up throughout the country by the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor.

They have been held at such varied locations as Ohio State University, University of Washington, Boston University and University of Southern California. Sponsoring organizations often include the AFL-CIO, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Young Women's Christian Association, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Association of University Women, as well as the host college, and many state and local groups.

A dozen such conferences have been held in the past three years; more are planned for this year and next. These sponsoring organizations often follow up the master conference with meetings of their own.

## Needed Skills Change

Counselors who are aware of changing trends in marketable skills and newly opening job opportunities are desperately needed today. Also, in many parts of the country, there are not nearly enough teachers, nurses, social workers or librarians, for instance. Next year the need may focus on other occupations, and would-be workers should know of these changes in time to prepare to meet them.

It has been charged that women are poor employment "risks." Women in the middle age ranges are a more stable group than either men or women under 25, a Civil Service Commission study discovered.

It is also commonly believed that women, by going to work, cause unemployment among men. Women today neither seek nor train for the majority of jobs held by men. Unemployed carpenters and auto workers would find few jobs if all the private secretaries, teachers and nurses suddenly resigned.

Women working full-time earn only about three-fifths as much as men. This is chiefly because more women hold lower-paying jobs. But all too often they fail to get promotions, or even the chance to train for them, mainly because they are women.

A woman's pay envelope is also often



Fremont Davis

*WORKING MOTHER—This mother is bidding goodbye to her children as she leaves for work before they start for school. She has arranged for her children to be cared for at home, as most working mothers do.*

thinner than a man's even when she is performing the same work equally well.

"There must be equal pay for equal work for both sexes as well as among the races. Pay should be based on the job done—not on who does the job," declares Mrs. Peterson, the Government's number one working mother. "The Federal Equal Pay Act was adopted last year, but far too few women are covered by the law. . . . The public, and particularly employers, must be educated to appreciate the many talents and good qualifications women bring to their jobs."

### Financial Reasons

Money is undoubtedly the main reason why women, and particularly mothers, work. They work to help support themselves and their children, to help buy a home or pay hospital bills, to send John or Jane to college. And the less the husbands make, the more likely the wives are to work.

In families where the husband earned less than \$3,000 a year, more than one-half of the mothers with children 6 to 17 years of age worked, according to the latest figures available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But when the husband's income was \$7,000 or more, the proportion dropped to three-tenths.

More than one-fourth of the mothers with children under six worked when their husbands earned under \$3,000, but only one-eighth of the mothers of these small children worked when their husbands earned \$7,000 or more per year.

The presence and age of the children in the family, however, has an even greater influence on whether a wife works than does the income of her husband. Most mothers stay home, when possible, to take care of their children, at least until they reach school age.

Among married women living with their husbands, the average proportion in the labor force varied from about one out of five for those with children under six to more than two out of five for those with school-age children only.

### More Work Part-Time

Of the more than 1.6 million working mothers with children under three, whose husbands are present, only about one-eighth have full-time jobs the year round. More than half work just part of the year at full-time jobs, and the other third fill part-time jobs. More than two-fifths of the million and a quarter working mothers who have at least one child three to five years old hold part-time jobs. But of the four and a half million mothers with children six to 17, about a third have full-time jobs the year round, a third work only part of the year and another third hold part-time jobs.

Working women, and particularly working mothers, have to hold tightly to their purse strings. Exploratory studies made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that working wives in several small towns spent about two-fifths of their total pay on such job-related expenses as transportation, lunches, taxes, paid help, office gifts and extra clothing. In addition, working mothers

often find that care of the children comes high.

Eight or nine out of every ten girls today will spend part of their lives in paid employment, according to the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor. Most girls today start to work immediately after finishing school—usually when they are 17 or 18 years old. But after about four years, the majority quit work to get married and have children.

Most women today complete their families at a much younger age than did their mothers or grandmothers, giving birth to their last child when they are only about 26 years old.

Stimulated by the need for more money, lighter housekeeping tasks and better job opportunities, many wives return to work after being out only about eight to ten years. If they return to work when they are 30, these mothers will work on the average another 23 years.

Today the average age of all women workers is 41, as compared to 26 in 1900, and 37 in 1950. More than three times as many women 45 to 64 years of age work today as held jobs in 1940. In 1963 more than half of the women 45 to 54 years of age were gainfully employed, many of them having returned to work when their family duties diminished.

Grandma may not wear the pants in the family, but she will be doing her part in bringing home the pay envelope.

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### CHEMISTRY

## New Woolen Fabrics Wash Without Shrinking

► SOME WOOLEN FABRICS can now be machine washed without shrinking.

Fewer sweaters need come out of the washing machine several sizes smaller and passed from father to son. A new process now can "set" natural wool fibers to prevent the material from shrinking, tangling and meshing into felt.

Wool fiber can first be dipped in an amine solution, squeezed, then dipped in an acid chloride solution and squeezed again. This process, invented at the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Western Utilization Research Laboratory in Albany, Calif., creates a very thin polyamide coating which is grafted chemically to the wool fibers by a reaction between the two solutions.

The process is called Wurlan, a name derived from a combination of the laboratory initials WUR and the Latin word for wool, lana. The laboratory is part of the Department's Agricultural Research Service.

The idea came from a chemical experiment known as the "nylon rope trick." It consists of placing two non-mixing solutions, an amine and an acid chloride, into a chemist's glass beaker.

The two chemicals react at the point of contact to form a nylon substance composed of very large, densely bonded molecules. This substance, called a polyamide, can be drawn out of the beaker in the form of a thin wet strand or "rope."

• Science News Letter, 85:251 April 18, 1964

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