# NORTH DAKOTA WOMEN IN THE OCCUPATIONAL WORLD: COMMITMENT, WORRIES AND COPING

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Women have become increasingly involved in responsibilities outside their homes. Employment of women is commonplace today and viewed by many people to be one of the most significant changes to affect family life. Indeed, it is a demanding task for women to combine employment with family responsibilities.

How do employed North Dakota women handle conflicts in the family and employment commitments? Why do they work outside their home? Do women still worry about their family's welfare? This study was designed to find answers to these questions.

Historical records show that women have played a significant role in the development of North Dakota and its people. Additionally, history indicates that North Dakota women took their responsibilities very seriously. For instance, the writings of Hiram Drache (1970) relate the important role housewives played in the farming operation. Farming was, by necessity, a family affair because women and children were needed to do much of the routine work.

The diary of Mary Dodge Woodward, written while she lived on a farm in North Dakota during 1884-1889, documents the pioneer women's concern for the welfare of their family. She wrote on January 8, 1887 about her son who had made a trip to Fargo: "I was afraid he would freeze, for the wind was blowing, and any Dakotan know what that means in winter . . . The last hour he was out was a hard one for me. I thought surely he would perish, but he arrived safely home at last." (1935; p. 158).

Autobiographies of Kansas pioneer women (Stratton, 1981) serve to further document the duty women have felt toward their families. Attempts to create a home out of simple earthen cabins, gather fuel and carry the family's water supply, deliver their own babies, and worry about the safety of their husbands and children are recorded in these autobiographies.

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### Methodology

During the fall of 1981, 416 North Dakota women were asked to provide information for this study. The women were members of one of four groups: vocational home economics teachers, nurses, members of the National Orgaization for Women or members of the Catholic Guild. Three groups were surveyed at their respective state conventions, and the Catholic Guild women were surveyed at a local meeting of the group. This study was limited to the 303 women who were employed full time.

Thirty-one percent of the sample was from rural areas (population under 5,000), 62 percent were from urban areas (population over 5,000), and 7 percent lived on farms. Sixty-three percent were married, 23 percent were never married, 10 percent were divorced, 3 percent were widowed and 1 percent were separated. The average length of marriage was 10 years. Forty-four percent of the women were between the ages of 21 and 30 years, 27 percent between 31 and 41 years, 7 percent between 42 and 52 years, 11 percent between 53 and 63 years and 1 percent over 63 years. The average age of the women's children was 8.3 years.

The occupations of the subjects varied, but there were nurses, teachers, secretaries, and people in the business world.

# **Results and Discussion**

Combining employment with family responsibilities requires a great deal of management skill in order to accomplish required tasks without fatigue. Often, the demands of employment conflict with demands by family. Time and energy expended frequently require the women to limit social activities in the community. Priorities must be established.

To determine priorities of the North Dakota women in this study, they were asked if they felt committed to family, employment or community. Less than one fourth (23.2 percent) said their employment had priority over their family. However, only 24.2 percent said their employment was second to their family and only 2.3 percent indicated that community activities combined

with family was their first priority. It appears that family and job are equally important to many women in this study. A total of 50.1 percent reported that employment and family shared priority in their lives. These data are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Commitment to Role Category by Women

Role	N	•
Life is centered on home and family	0	0.0
Community activities combined with family	7	2.35
Family has priority over employment	72	24.24
Employment and family share priority	149	50.16
Employment has priority over family	69	23.23

The reasons why women work, as indicated in this sample, represent a change from traditional reasons. In times past, many women worked for "pin money," helping out in a fashion supportive of the family, but not really oriented toward the woman herself. The reasons for employment in this sample are found in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Most Important Reason For Employment

Reason	N	%
Dedicated to own career development	88	30.24
Only source of financial support	75	25.77
Helps family have higher standard of living	50	17.18
Enjoy work	35	12.02
Only because of financial necessity	25	8.59
Buy "extras" for family and self	11	3.78
Help children through college	5	1.71

The largest percentage (30.2 percent) indicated that the main reason they were employed was dedication to career development. Relatively few women were working so that they could buy extras for their families. These North Dakota women seem to be saying that work means something different than just helping out around the house. Their work is career oriented, implying a commitment to the job and a hope for advancement. Indeed, these women are viewing their employment commitments with higher levels of enthusiasm and vibgor. This may be a sign of changing perspectives of women in North Dakota.

Problems are often created when women pursue careers outside of the home. Several methods of handling these problems were reported by the women in this sample and are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Most Common Method of Resolving Family Tension
Resulting from Women's Employment

Method	N	%
Encourage husand to see your problem of		
home/work	58	23.01
Accept less perfection at home	55	19.84
Separate home and work	50	19.84
Try to do better in all areas of life	37	14.68
Expect husband to help more	30	11.90
Try to make it up to family by compensating	10	3.96
Encourage children to see your problem	9	3.57
Expect children to help more	3	1.19

Combining home management and the everyday work world represents some problems. Many different ways of handling these problems were indicated by the women in this study. The most striking result was that very few of the women expected their children to help them. Only 1 percent said they expected their children to assist. This may be because the average age of the child was eight years, yet there are many household responsibilities that can be assumed by children of this age. Furthermore, it is important for children to assume responsibilities gradually, as their age allows, in order for them to accept more important responsibilities in their teen-age years.

It was also surprising that only 11.9 percent of the women expected their husbands to help them, but 23 percent said they encouraged their husband to see their problem of combining employment and the family. What this means is unclear, but one cannot help wondering if these women complained about their plight without actually taking steps to solve their problem by requiring work in the home to be shared. The majority of women reported they used problem solving and conflict resolution methods that did not require effort from other family members, such as accepting less perfection at home in areas of housework. (21.8 percent), separating home and work (19.8 percent), and trying to do better in all areas of their life (14.6 percent). These methods may, however, affect other family members through the wife/mother fatigue that often results from work overload and "trying harder."

The most common source of worry for the women in this study was their families (40.8 percent). Specific worries related to possible drug and alcohol usage by their children, their husband's drinking, family relationships and the family's welfare in general. Factors related to self, such as health and job, were reported by 33.9 percent of the women, and 16 percet reported economic worries as their main source of concern. Being able to manage a home and career was mentioned by 9.1 percent of the subjects. These results are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Most Common Source of Worry for Women

Source	N	%
Self	89	33.96
Family	107	40.84
Economy	42	16.03
Managing Home and Career	24	9.16

These data seem to be saying that the women in this sample still worry about their families and are still concerned about their welfare. The number of women indicating factors related to self is nearly as high as those indicating family concerns, showing that concern for the self is an important aspect of life quality for many of these women.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The employed North Dakota women in this study appear to have much in common with their ancestors. They still worry about the family's well being and take

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There were no significant differences between planting dates for common smut and common rust infection levels, so these ratings were averaged over dates. Resistance to common smut is always a selection criterion in the North Dakota corn improvement project, while resistance to rust is a criterion only when natural infection levels are moderately severe. Yield losses from rust are much less than those from the other two diseases, so selection against susceptibility to this disease has been less rigorous. Probably due to the relative emphasis in previous selection, all lines showed some level of rust infection, but 17 lines were not infected with common smut and most others were infected at quite low levels. Only two lines, ND407 and W64A, had infection levels above 5 percent.

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Six lines (ND300, ND376, ND408, ND468, CM105, and CM174) were resistant to both smuts, but resistance to one of these diseases does not necessarily imply resistance to both. Genes for resistance to these diseases are different. The resistance is expected to be quite stable, once seed companies identify lines possessing this resistance and use them to produce resistant hybrids.

Head smut can cause severe yield reductions, but it is not expected to become a major problem for corn producers of this area. Seed companies producing hybrids for this region are capable of rapidly shifting to resistant hybrids since most inbreds appear to be resistant to this disease. Future inbreds undoubtedly will be screened for resistance to head smut if the disease appears to be a serious hazard.

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their family responsibilities seriously. However, unlike their ancestors, these women do not expect their children to help with household work. Also unlike their ancestors, these women are dedicated to employment outside the home and work for career advancement.

They feel a commitment to both their career and family. They are employed because of financial reasons, but mainly because of dedication to their jobs. Generally, they do not expect their children or husband to help them with home related work, but they do try to get their husbands to see the problems faced in combining employment and caring for a family. Their worries are

mostly related to their family's well being, but they also worry about themselves and financial matters.

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