

# Comparison of Working and Nonworking Wives in Food Shopping and Preparation



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COMPARISON OF WORKING AND NONWORKING WIVES

IN FOOD SHOPPING AND PREPARATION

ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES <sup>1/</sup>

By Mildred R. Wightman and John B. Roberts <sup>2/</sup>

Employment figures for 1957-58 show that women make-up 33 percent of the labor force in the United States and that 53 percent of them are married, have families, and maintain homes. Since 1940 the number of married women entering the labor force has doubled. Indications are that these figures will continue to increase. <sup>3/</sup>

This question often has been raised: Do the food buying and preparation practices of working wives differ from those of wives who are not employed outside the home? If so, marketing agencies should be alert to implications of these differences for changing and expanding markets.

United States Department of Agriculture home economists made a nation-wide study which was reported in 1960. <sup>4/</sup> They found that the family diets of the two groups were generally alike in nutritional value, but families with a working wife spent approximately 56 cents more per person on weekly food supplies than families of similar incomes in which wives were not employed. They had more meat, poultry, fish, bakery products, fats, and oils than those in which the homemaker was not employed. They tended to select more of the expensive types and cuts of meat. Although they used more of certain prepared foods, they were not the leading buyers of all "convenience" foods. Flour mixes, for example, were used more often by wives who did not work outside the home.

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<sup>3/</sup> 1958 Handbook on Women Workers, United States Department of Labor Women's Bureau Bulletin 266, pp. 4, 31, 37.

<sup>4/</sup> Household Food Consumption Survey - 1955, U. S. D. A. Report No. 15, p. 1.

In 1958 a consumer's study of 572 Louisville families was conducted. Ninety families with working wives were analyzed and compared with 482 families where the wife was not employed outside the home. In addition to studying consumption and cost figures, a study was made of attitudes and practices involving certain food shopping and preparation activities of both groups of homemakers. Findings of the study are given in this report.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES <sup>5/</sup>

Although the Louisville sample was small, it compared favorably with the nation's group of working wives in age distribution, education, and type of work performed. The greatest percentage of the employed women in the study was between the ages of 40 to 49.

TABLE 1. - DISTRIBUTION OF WORKING WIVES BY AGE

<u>Years of Age</u>	<u>Percent</u>
20 - 29	16
30 - 39	21
40 - 49	29
50 - 59	22
60 - over	10
No information	2

The working wife was better educated than her stay-at-home sister: 73 percent had been through part or all of high school compared with 67 percent of the nonworking wives. About 25 percent of the working and 20 percent of the nonworking wives had been through part or all of college.

A little over one-third of the women (36 percent) worked as maids, cooks, or laundresses in private homes or hotels, as beauticians, waitresses, elevator operators, or hospital attendants. Almost one-fourth (24 percent) were in the professional category which included teachers, social workers, nurses, and managers and owners of private businesses. One-fifth (20 percent) were classed as craftsmen or operatives, indicating that they operated machines usually in textile, shoe, or furniture factories. Nearly one-fifth (19 percent) were in clerical or sales jobs such as bookkeepers, stenographers, salesladies in stores, real estate or insurance offices. The proportion in this group in Louisville was small compared with the same group for the nation as a whole, but the private household and service workers group in Louisville was larger than that for the nation.

TABLE 2. - DISTRIBUTION OF WORKING WIVES BY OCCUPATION

	<u>Percent</u>
Private household and service workers	36
Professional and managerial	24
Craftsmen, foremen, operatives	20
Clerical and sales workers	19
No information	1

<sup>5/</sup> The sample was drawn randomly from census tracts and weighed by income groups. Sampling rates among Negro families was 20 percent higher than for whites. No separation was made by race for working and nonworking wives. The working wife group included 52 white and 38 Negro families.



Family size (approximately 3.5 persons) was the same for both groups, though there were fewer large families in the working wife group. Thirty-six percent of them were two-person families and 43 percent were all adults. In the nonworking group 27 percent were two-person families and 35 percent all adult families.

Over one-fifth of the working wives were the principal wage earners for their families. Forty-seven percent of the working wives had some or all of their children 12 years of age or under. Another 10 percent had all teenagers. These figures were similar to those for the nation: 58 percent of the women who worked outside the home had children under 18 years of age.<sup>6/</sup>

Fifty percent of the families with working wives had per capita incomes of \$1,200 to \$2,399 compared with 37 percent of the families with nonworking wives.

Twelve percent more of the families in which the wife was not employed had incomes of less than \$1,200 per person, and about 20 percent of both groups had per capita incomes of \$2,400 and over.

TABLE 3. - DISTRIBUTION OF WORKING AND NONWORKING WIFE FAMILIES  
BY PER CAPITA INCOME

Per Capita Income	All Families		Working Wife Families		Nonworking Wife Families	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Under \$1,200	235	41	28	31	207	43
\$1,200 - \$2,399	221	39	45	50	176	37
\$2,400 - over	116	20	17	19	99	20
Total	572	100	90	100	482	100

#### MONEY SPENT FOR FOOD

No special study was made of the number of meals eaten away from home, though data showed that 2 percent more families with nonworking wives sometimes ate out (50 percent compared with 48 percent for families with working wives). These figures for Louisville vary from those reported in the U. S. D. A. study for urban areas of the South which showed that 57 percent employed and 49 percent nonemployed wife families sometimes ate meals away from home.<sup>7/</sup> Buying meals away from home was not recorded for any of the families, and accordingly no attempt was made to evaluate total food costs. Rather, the focus was on the cost of food used at home on a price per person meal basis.

The amount of money spent for food (the average grocery bill) was about 10 percent less where the wives worked outside the home than where they did not. The average cost per person meal was also less for all income groups, the difference being greatest in the highest income group (\$2,400-over per capita) where it was 4 cents less per person meal or 84 cents per person per week.

<sup>6/</sup> 1958 Handbook on Women Workers, United States Department of Labor, Women's Bureau Bulletin 266, p. 41.

<sup>7/</sup> Household Food Consumption Survey - 1955, U. S. D. A. Report No. 15, p. 89.

TABLE 4. - COST PER PERSON MEAL IN WORKING AND NONWORKING WIFE FAMILIES BY PER CAPITA INCOME

	<u>Working Wives</u>	<u>Nonworking Wives</u>
Under \$1,200	23 cents	25 cents
\$1,200-\$2,399	34 "	35 "
\$2,400-over	44 "	48 "

No special evaluation was made of the adequacy of the diets in Louisville, though other studies have shown that there was little difference in the foods used by the families in the two groups.<sup>8/</sup> Where differences were noted they did not prove to be statistically significant. However, the figures failed to support the idea that the working wife uses more of the expensive, ready-prepared and "convenience" foods than does the nonworking wife. The belief that the working wife did not have time for elaborate preparations and that she was a target for fancy or expensive luxury foods was not borne out in this analysis. On the contrary, she may have been more "money conscious" and managed her food budget to better advantage than her nonemployed counterpart.

#### TIME FOR MEAL PREPARATION

A little over half of both working and non-working wives thought they had adequate time for meal preparation, and they would not spend more time on their family's meals if they could. About one-third of the working and one-fourth of the nonworking wives would like more time. The main changes they would make would be to (1) cook more foods they had never cooked before, (2) fix more desserts, and (3) bake more. Working wives were more adventurous when it came to trying a new recipe and experimenting with new foods.

A rushed atmosphere was noticed at breakfast more than at any other time. Speaking generally, more working than nonworking wives felt this pressure. There was less feeling of hurry in the evening though at this time more nonworking than working wives were rushed. Very few in either group had any time problem at noon.

#### ATTITUDES TOWARD VARIOUS SHOPPING SERVICES

There was no significant difference between the attitudes of working and nonworking wives toward the various time-saving and convenience services; however, some of the variations between groups are interesting. More nonworking wives wanted the butcher to be at the meat counter and charge and delivery services, while more working wives preferred the self-service meat counter and cut-up poultry service. (Table 5).

TABLE 5. - A COMPARISON OF THE DESIRES OF WORKING AND NONWORKING WIVES IN RELATION TO SELECTED SHOPPING SERVICES

	<u>% Wanting Service</u>	
	<u>Working Wives</u>	<u>Nonworking Wives</u>
Butcher at meat counter	47	58
Self-service meat counter	61	55
Cut-up poultry	66	64
Charge and delivery	10	21

<sup>8/</sup> Dorothy Dickens, "Food Use and Gainful Employment of the Wife," Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 558, pp 1-16, 1958 and Food, The Yearbook of Agriculture, U. S. D. A., 1959, p. 619.



### Attitudes Toward Meat Services

Significantly, both working and nonworking wives wanted a combination of meat services. The self-service counter was acceptable for certain types of purchases, but on some occasions they wanted the help and advice of the butcher. The reason working wives gave for preferring the self-service meat counter was not to save time, but because they "like to pick and choose." "Time saving" ranked second by both working and nonworking groups. It "takes too much time" was the first ranking reason given by both groups for not wanting the butcher's services.

Approximately one-fourth of the working and one-fifth of the nonworking wives were indifferent about their meat shopping services and did not care one way or another. On the other hand, many homemakers gave more than one reason for wanting or not wanting a service. Therefore, percentages in the following tables do not total 100.

TABLE 6. - REASONS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD SELF-SERVICE MEAT COUNTER

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Working Wives</u>	<u>Nonworking Wives</u>
	%	%
Like to pick and choose	56	45
Saves time	25	31
Want to know cost	2	5
 <u>Negative</u> 		
Want to see it (couldn't see defects)	28	29
Meat not fresh	29	18
Don't like packaged meat (just prefer butcher)	65	54
Cannot get correct amounts	18	11

TABLE 7. - REASONS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD BUTCHER AT MEAT COUNTER

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Working Wives</u>	<u>Nonworking Wives</u>
	%	%
Can get special amount and cuts	62	79
Like personal attention of butcher	31	32
Meat is fresher	7	8
 <u>Negative</u> 		
Indifferent and don't care	24	19
Takes too much time	32	29
Like self-service counter better	16	24
Feel obligated to take what butcher cuts	16	7

While modern merchandising has successfully trained the customer to be primarily self-servicing, the homemaker still clings to the idea that a butcher who is available to serve special needs on a personal basis adds to consumer satisfaction.

In confirmation of this statement a surprisingly large number of women (47 percent working, 58 percent nonworking) still preferred to have the butcher available. Their main reason was that they could get special cuts and amounts. Almost one-third of both groups indicated that they valued the personal attention of the butcher.

#### Attitudes Toward Cut-Up Poultry

About two-thirds of both groups wanted the cut-up poultry service. "Saves time" was the first ranking reason for wanting it. This was more important for the working wives: 41 percent of them gave this reason compared with 26 percent of the nonworking group. About the same proportion of the nonworking group said they preferred to cut up their own poultry (22 and 24 percent, respectively). Attitudes on this question and other considerations are summarized in Table 8.

TABLE 8. - REASONS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD CUT-UP POULTRY

	<u>Working Wives</u>	<u>Nonworking Wives</u>
	%	%
Saves time	41	26
Likes to cut her own	22	24
Do not like to cut it up	17	19
Less expensive to buy whole and cut up	6	8
Like to buy certain pieces	3	7
Miscellaneous or no answer	11	16

A further exploration of attitudes as applied specifically to broilers showed that about three-fourths of the homemakers surveyed preferred to have them cut up at the store. Among the reasons given were that it (1) saved time, (2) was more convenient, (3) there was a lack of know-how, (4) the knives at home were not satisfactory, and (5) the job was distasteful. The most favorable attitude toward cut-up poultry was found among the younger age groups and among the higher income families. These same groups looked favorably on buying only the special pieces they liked. Among the homemakers who preferred whole chicken were Negroes, low income families, and a considerable number of older housewives.

#### Charge and Delivery Services

Charge and delivery services were not popular with either group. Only one-tenth of the working and one-fifth of the nonworking wives wanted them. The first ranking reason with both groups was that they simply did not like the idea.

Other reasons were that these services increased the cost of groceries and that they liked to go to the store and select things. Only 14 percent of the working and 20 percent of the nonworking wives liked them because of their convenience.



TABLE 9. - REASONS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD CHARGE AND DELIVERY SERVICE

	Working Wives	Nonworking Wives
	%	%
Don't like the idea	43	50
Like convenience	14	20
Like to go to store and select	9	13
Increases cost of groceries	10	6
Don't know or no answer	24	11

### DAIRY PRODUCTS USE

In addition to studying general attitudes, special emphasis was given to the place of milk and dairy products in the food marketing picture and to desserts with special emphasis on ice cream and ready-mix preparations.

#### Desserts

Results showed that pie, ice cream, and cake, in that order, were first choice desserts of both groups. Percentages were higher for the working than for the nonworking wives in all cases.

TABLE 10. - BAKING PRACTICES AND FIRST CHOICE DESSERTS OF WORKING AND NONWORKING WIVES

Wives	Doing Any Baking For Family	Using Any Mixes	First Choice Desserts					
			Pie	Ice				
				Cream	Cake	Fruit	Cookies	Other
Working	89	78	34	30	21	8	6	1
Nonworking	92	80	33	28	16	13	7	3

Approximately 91 percent of all wives indicated that they did some baking for their families. A few more nonworking wives (3 percent) baked at home. Eighty percent of them reported using mixes compared with 78 percent of the working wives. Thus, if the working wife served the favorite family dessert, as indicated, sometimes she may have bought it ready-made. These are not really significant differences. However, for the nonworking wives there is some evidence that fruits may be substituted for cake among select groups. The demand for ice cream was about the same in both groups.

Nonworking wives looked more kindly on ice cream as an appropriate company dessert than did working wives (54 percent compared with 50 percent). Only 12 percent in each group said they would serve plain ice cream to guests. Another 28 percent of the working wives and 24 percent of the nonworking wives would serve it in combination with fruit, sauce, pie, or cake.

Pie was the favorite company dessert of both groups, and 4 percent more working than nonworking wives would serve it (33 compared with 29 percent).

### Beverage Choice with Lunches Away from Home

The women who sometimes ate meals away from home were asked what they would choose to drink with four selected lunch menus.<sup>9/</sup> The nonworking wives more often chose milk than did the working wives. However, coffee, tea, and soft drinks were much more popular than milk. Among the nonworking wives milk was most popular with the sandwich type menu: 17 percent chose it in both warm and cold weather. Working wives chose milk to go with the plate lunch more often than with any other type lunch, though the percentages were only 7 for warm and 9 for cold weather.

For all women, soft drinks were first choice with the hamburger and sandwich lunch in warm weather. Tea was first choice with the plate lunch and seafood plate, though coffee ran a very close second with the seafood.

In cold weather coffee was first choice with the seafood plate and plate lunch for all women. Nonworking women also preferred coffee with the sandwich and hamburger, but the working wife chose soft drinks with these two.

Tea was more popular with working than nonworking wives with all lunches in both seasons. A reason for this may be that working women were accustomed to the popular "coffee break" during the morning and wanted a change of beverage for lunch.

### Milk Equivalent Used

Working and nonworking wife families used approximately the same amounts of milk equivalent per person - 4.6 and 4.7 quarts per week, respectively. In comparing specific products, all variations in per person consumption were small. Both groups used the same amounts of whole milk. Families with working wives used more dry milk and buttermilk and the same amounts of evaporated milk, cottage cheese, and frozen desserts as did families with nonworking wives. Families with nonworking wives used more fresh skim milk and yellow cheese.

Although both groups used the same amount of evaporated milk, 16 percent more working than nonworking wives used it. This, along with the working wives' use of more dry milk may have been due to the shelf storage convenience of these products. Both could be kept on hand and ready for use, whereas whipping cream and extra fresh milk would have to be planned for and ordered ahead of time. Also, cost may have been a factor, as the working wife showed a tendency to be more economical in her food management. Data indicated that many of the nonworking wives used evaporated milk for infant formulas.

Highest per capita consumption of skim milk was in the high income group (\$2,400-over, per capita) of nonworking wives. This might be attributed to their being weight conscious and using it for dieting purposes.

<sup>9/</sup> These menus were (1) plate lunch with pork chop, french fries, peas, lettuce and tomato, (2) hamburger on bun with lettuce, tomato, pickle, onion rings, and potato chips, (3) meat sandwich with lettuce, tomato, pickle, onion rings, and potato chips, (4) fish plate with french fries, pickle slices, and cole slaw.



TABLE 11. - WEEKLY PER PERSON CONSUMPTION OF MILK EQUIVALENT OF SELECTED DAIRY PRODUCTS BY WORKING AND NONWORKING WIFE FAMILIES

	Working Wives	Nonworking Wives
	Quarts	Quarts
Whole milk	2.9	2.9
Skim milk	.*	.2
Buttermilk	.2	.1
Chocolate milk	-	-
Half-half	-	-
Dry milk	.3	.2
Evaporated	.2	.2
Whipping cream	-	-
Coffee cream	-	-
Sour cream	-	-
Dried cream	-	-
Cottage cheese	.1	.1
All other cheese	.7	.8
Frozen dessert	.2	.2
	4.6 quarts	4.7 quarts

\* Amounts used were less than 0.05 quart per person.

#### Dairy Dishes Prepared

Comparison of the various kinds of milk and other dairy dishes which working and non-working wives prepared for their families showed no significant differences, however, more working wives used custards and whipped evaporated milk in salads and desserts and as a dessert topping. Custards may have been used more because they are easy to prepare, can be prepared in advance and they use both milk and eggs, two highly nutritious foods which the busy wife may have neglected in the other meals of the day.

Macaroni and cheese was a favorite dish - over 90 percent of both groups used it. More working than nonworking wives had served it during the past month. Other dishes which more than 40 percent of both groups had served during the past month were creamed vegetables made with milk, creamed soups, cheeseburgers or sandwiches, cream pies, puddings, and milk drinks. All of these except creamed soups and cheeseburgers or cheese sandwiches were served by more working than nonworking wives. The most common reasons for not having served a particular dish were "never tried" and "don't like."

TABLE 12. - A COMPARISON OF WORKING AND NONWORKING WIVES  
AS TO DAIRY DISHES PREPARED AND SERVED DURING THE PAST MONTH

Dish	Percent Serving	
	Working Wives	Nonworking Wives
Macaroni and cheese	69	59
Creamed vegetables made with milk	64	53
Puddings	51	42
Cheeseburgers or sandwiches	48	57
Cream pies	47	41
Creamed soups	42	47
Milk drinks	41	40
Custards	40	33
Creamed meats or casseroles	30	33
Meat loaf made with milk	27	29
Milk shakes	27	24
Whipped cream as a topping	24	15
Commercial whipped topping	24	17
Cheese sauce over vegetables or meat	23	21
Whipped cream in salads or desserts	16	12
Commercial sour cream	7	9
Whipped evaporated as a topping or in salads or desserts	7	3
Cheese puddings, souffles or fondues	3	5
Whipped dry milk in salads or desserts	2	2

#### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions drawn from this study were that there are more similarities than differences in the food buying and use practices of working and nonworking wives and that minor differences noted may be attributed to factors other than the wife's employment.

The working wife in Louisville did not spend more money for food and did not use significantly more short-cuts in shopping and preparation, which she might well have used to advantage.

With increased numbers of married women entering the working world and with maid service at a premium, marketing promotional agencies would do well to direct special attention to the needs of this group. They could promote the advantage of "built-in maid service" in the many time-saving products and services already available on the market, as well as in new ones as they are introduced.