

Economic Empowerment of Young and Old Women with a Focus on Childcare Work in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Childcare is one of the occupations undertaken by women during their reproductive age and many times, they get bogged down in it and are unable to engage in productive work. However, the economic situation prevailing in the world today demands that women engage in productive work, which demands that they hire services of a house help. This forces them to leave their homes and engage in productive work because childcare makes them dependent and poor. Recently, in Kenya, there has been an emergence of a group mostly of elderly women who are now providing home-based childcare services to the younger and productive women, who now attend their productive work while the old women look after the children. This was an indigenous African society phenomenon where the grandmothers used to look after the children. Today, those grandmothers and the younger women do not normally share the same homesteads. Young women invite groups of older women into their spaces who are taking their time off, or they use their spaces to care for these young women's children. They provide them with childcare work. The younger women bring food, diapers and clothes to ease the work of the older women's childcare while they become economically productive, while the older women also get economically empowered through income earned from their childcare work, hence meeting their needs, especially at this time of their age when they are not energetic enough to engage in productive work outside their areas of occupation. This economic structure benefits both the young and the old women. The study was guided by the theory of change in the Thika sub-county of Kiambu County using online questionnaires. This was conducted in June 2024, and a total of 37 respondents participated. The

purpose of this study was to establish whether the cooperation between old women and young mothers in childcare contributes to their economic empowerment; and if the structure can be regularised and up-scaled to ease the burden of women in navigating their multiple roles as assigned by the society. The findings indicated that young women's work is greatly affected by childcare, and the availability of older women to assist in childcare is instrumental to their productivity and stability in economic development. The study rested on the premise that this structure should be studied to see the role it can play in enhancing women's economic capacity in both categories. This can be achieved through government formulation of the structure in policies such as Vision 2030 on the socioeconomic pillar.

Key Words: Women's Economic Empowerment, Home-based Childcare, Income, Home Space, Home Time, Economic Structure.

1.0 Background

Caring for children is highly valued by parents and caregivers, as it is essential for their development and well-being. Women, particularly those who are poor and vulnerable, bear a significant amount of childcare responsibilities. Across centuries and in many societies worldwide, women have borne the burden of childcare responsibility. Research has shown that since time immemorial, women have always had multiple responsibilities compared to men; childcare duties, domestic work and productive responsibilities (Fineman, 2011). While men have always been considered family breadwinners, women have always chipped in to assist or even been the main family breadwinners, and yet, they are still expected to provide childcare duties.

A study by UN Women (2023) indicates that across different countries worldwide, older women provide childcare support for their grandchildren as their young mothers go to work. For example, the study found that in Belgium, Greece, Luxemburg, and Switzerland, an average of 37% of older women took care of their grandchildren on a weekly basis while the children's mothers went to work. In the United States, a report by the Department of Labour (2023) indicated that about 9.5% of women aged 55 years and above provide childcare support to children of their relatives and friends. The report indicated that the childcare support provided is mostly unpaid for or compensated in an informal way. The report also indicated that mothers preferred leaving their children under their grandmother's care than childcare centres.

According to Mathambo and Gibbs (2009), childcare was the primary responsibility of women. In most homesteads, men were not expected to be childcare providers as the roles were considered appropriate for women. For example, in indigenous societies, men went hunting, tilling on farms, taking care of cattle, and doing other responsibilities that were considered 'manly' as women stayed home to take care of children. However, young women were also expected to assist with farm activities, such as collecting firewood, fetching water, and taking care of cattle, among other activities. Older women remained at home and assisted with childcare support.

In Kenya, grandmothers were crucial to the collective community's responsibility of raising children before colonialism (Woodhead, 1996). As grandmothers took care of childcare

responsibilities, the younger mothers engaged in productive activities that benefitted their families. According to Kipkorir and Njenga (1993), formal preschools were first offered in Kenya in the 1940s, although they were based on race to accommodate Asians and white settlers. However, formal preschools were not preferred as good alternatives for childcare support among the indigenous communities in Kenya. Relatives, especially older female relatives who could not engage in intensive labour, were entrusted with childcare responsibilities.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish whether cooperation between old women and young mothers in childcare is contributing to their economic empowerment and whether the structure can be regularised and upscaled to ease women's burden in navigating the multiple roles assigned by society.

The specific objectives are; -

1. Determine the benefits of cooperation between young and old women in childcare work.
2. Evaluate the challenges old and young women encounter in their childcare work.
3. Suggest measures that can be used to improve the cooperation between young and older women in childcare work.

2.1 Literature review

This subsection provides a literature review regarding the economic empowerment of young and old women, focusing on childcare work in Kenya.

2.2 Childcare provision by old women among Indigenous communities in Kenya

Mothers have been the primary providers of childcare in many cultures across the world (Himmelweit & Sigala, 2002). In the United States of America, several strategies were used by the Native Americans to care for their Preschool children as their mothers went to work (Burger, 2012). For example, newborns were strapped to cradle boards, woven slings, standing stools, and baby tents, among others. Still, young mothers left their children under the care of their grandmothers. During the period of industrialisation in France, young women were recruited as cheap labour to work in industries (Downs, Costin & McFadden, 1996). During this period, mothers struggled to juggle work and childcare responsibilities. They left their children under the care of their grandmothers and other relatives. In many traditional African indigenous societies, farming was the main source of livelihood. The young and old were expected to participate in subsistence farming to enable them to cater for their household needs. However, as people got older, their ability to work on the farm declined.

In Kenya, old women who could no longer do farming stayed at home and engaged themselves with other work considered 'lighter' in their homesteads (Clark, Kabiru, Laszlo & Muthuri, 2019).

Old people are defined as those aged 60 years and above (World Health Organization, 2015). Working on the farms was considered heavy work, which required the input of younger generations of women. Some of the work the old women undertook was childcare work. They mostly cared for their young grandchildren as their mothers worked on the farms. It was also common for them to take care of their neighbours' children on request and get compensated with farm produce, which resulted from the labour of the young mothers and other family members (Clark et al., 2019). However, such compensation was based on mutual and unwritten agreements that were not plainly referenced. Korotayev, Zinkina, Goldstone and Shulgin (2016) explain that the availability of more female relatives in the homesteads of most indigenous African societies was advantageous and made it easier for mothers because they left their children with them when going to work. The female relatives who were left with childcare were usually the older women. However, Korotayev et al. (2016) explain that younger girls who could not work were also left with childcare responsibilities as their mothers or older female relatives went to work.

Male relatives were not expected to take childcare responsibilities because they were required to work on farms and do other work, such as taking care of cattle (Muendo, 2014). Depending on the community and the gender division of labour, women were not necessarily required to care for cattle unless there were few male relatives in their homesteads. This meant that women still engaged in farming while doubling up as childcare givers. Men were praised for their hard work on the farms, while women received little or no recognition for their childcare work (Clark et al., 2016). Society assumed that childcare was automatically a woman's work, which men could not assist with. This placed the responsibility of childcare centrally on women and removed it altogether from men.

Among the Agikuyu community in Kenya, childcare was the responsibility of women and other female relatives within the homestead (Kariuki & Nelson, 2006). Female relatives of extended families would also take childcare responsibility during their visits. Grandmothers took care of their grandchildren when their mothers were working on the farms or doing other work that would benefit their families. They treated their grandchildren as their own children.

Among the Abagusii, grandmothers stayed at home with their grandchildren as other family members went to work (Matagaro, 2005). They fed the children and engaged in other chores such as sweeping, drying, and winnowing grains. However, this traditional arrangement of childcare work is no longer viable due to urbanisation and economic demands, which do not allow people to operate in their traditional spaces. Hence, the need for new structures that can be utilised to serve the same purpose.

2.3 Childcare provision by old women in modern Kenya

The arrangement where young mothers leave their children under the care of old women as they go to work has evolved over time. Still, gender disadvantage persists, as women's increased

participation in paid work has not been accompanied by a corresponding change in the gender division of unpaid work, particularly childcare (Kabeer, 2021). Women retain childcare responsibilities even when they take paid jobs. In most societies today, the amount of time women spend on unpaid care work increases significantly with the presence of small children, particularly those under five years old. According to the latest World Bank estimates, more than 40% of children below primary school age need structured childcare but cannot access it (World Bank, 2023). Access to dependable childcare is critical to women's economic development. In most indigenous African societies, old women offered childcare, which enabled young mothers to work. Young girls also offered childcare support to their mothers and relatives who went to work. However, this is not possible in contemporary societies as it is considered child labour. School-going girls can also not double up as childcare givers. In most contemporary African societies, particularly in urban centres, old women can now earn a living from such arrangements and, in return, support young mothers to make a living too by going to work.

Women are more likely to work, attend school, or start a business in places where childcare is available, affordable, and valued. This is especially revolutionary in environments where women traditionally have fewer economic growth prospects. Mothers, especially of pre-school children, find it difficult to combine unpaid childcare roles and productive work. Research has shown that childcare provision can improve women's labour market outcomes across various indicators, including employment, income, and migration from the informal to the formal sector. However, most women cannot afford formal structured childcare assistance and hence seek the services of relatives, especially their grandmothers (Muendo, 2014). However, this kind of arrangement has been affected by factors that have changed the conventional family structures, especially in African societies, more so the extended family network.

Urbanisation, internal and international migration, and the breakdown of extended family support networks have all exacerbated the work-family balance in this day and age, more so in the African context where extended family members play a vital role in childcare work. Urbanisation has led to social, economic and even cultural changes. Increased urbanisation has changed working patterns, with growing female employment outside of their homes resulting in a significant demand for child-care options. As the number of nuclear families and single-mother households increases, more women take on financial responsibilities for their children. Even when extended family members are close by, family members' ability to aid one another is sometimes hampered, particularly among the poor, when economic necessity forces all adult family members to engage in income-generating activities (Hein & Cassirer, 2010). Thus, the reliance on extended family members to provide childcare support is diminishing. This is the case even in the Kenyan context, where the migration of young women from rural to urban centres in search of work has recently been on the rise (Magri, 2011). Changing family patterns, especially in urban areas where nuclear families or single parenthood are preferable, means that most women cannot rely on female relatives to take care of their children. This has increased the demand for paid childcare. Aside from the dynamics of changing family arrangements, strong traditional attitudes that caregiving is

the mother's job to handle privately with the support of domestic workers still exist in most societies. This assumption ignores the fact that childcare is not an equal barrier for all women; skilled women earning standard pay may afford daycare more easily than their less skilled counterparts (Magri, 2011). Poor families are more vulnerable when it comes to covering the cost of childcare support because it affects a big chunk of their income (Anderson & Levine, 1999).

Muendo (2014) writes that childcare services in formal daycare centres in urban areas like Nairobi are readily available but also unaffordable for most mothers, especially the ones working in the informal sector, for example, in small-scale businesses such as food and vegetable vending. Such mothers usually face the dilemma of getting someone to care for their children as they seek to improve their economic status. As such, they seek cheaper alternatives, mostly in the informal sector. Because of the societal beliefs and traditions in Kenya, men are usually not considered options for childcare work (Magri, 2011). Old women are usually entrusted with childcare as they are seen as being able to provide motherly care owing to their motherhood experiences as opposed to young women.

Studies have shown that mothers in Kenya often prefer informal childcare due to affordability, flexibility, and the close, trusted relationships they have with caregivers within their communities (Kipuri & Ridge, 2021). Informal childcare centres in most urban areas in Kenya are poorly established (Caddy, 2017). Older women exclusively run these centres, and the centres do not meet the standards for early childhood development as demanded by the Kenyan government (Sitati, Ndirangu, Kennedy & Rapongo, 2016). Such centres lack enough facilities and trained staff and have low supervision. However, mothers opt for them, especially in low-income areas, since they are cheaper. For example, mothers pay slightly below one US dollar in informal daycare centres in Nairobi for a single child from morning to evening (Muendo, 2014). Usually, the women engaging in childcare services have small spaces like single or double rooms. They provide support services to a number of babies that they can manage. However, Muendo (2014) notes that quality of service is a concern among mothers with higher incomes. For low-income mothers, the cost of childcare provision takes precedence over the quality of the services.

In the contemporary world, the relationship between old women and young working women for childcare support in developing countries has been hastened by the financial need of old women and the need for childcare support by young women (International Labour Organization, 2024). This is a symbiotic relationship where young women need the childcare services of the old women, and the old women need to empower themselves financially by engaging in childcare support. According to Sitati et al. (2016), traditionally, old women were cared for by their young unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law. However, they did not count much on their daughters to take care of them in old age as they were also expected to marry and start their own families. This meant that daughters-in-law took the responsibility to take care of their mothers-in-law. Some of the responsibilities the daughters-in-law engaged in included working on the farms, fetching water, and fetching firewood, among other chores. On the contrary, their mothers-in-law, especially the

old ones, stayed behind to care for their children. This kind of arrangement benefitted both the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. It ensured that the fundamental needs of old women, such as the provision of food, were catered for. It also ensured that young women remained economically productive and could cater to their needs and those of their families.

Disruption of traditional family arrangements has affected the socio-economic well-being of the ageing population. Adem (2019) writes that elderly persons in Kenya are facing social isolation where there is no one to take care of their needs as it used to be in traditional family setups where there was intergenerational co-existence. The intergenerational co-existence ensured that older people's needs were cared for as the younger generation was always around. Even in the urban centres, the elderly have become isolated as single-parent and nuclear family arrangements, among other new family arrangements, have become the norm. This forces old women to seek financial-generating activities to cater to their unmet needs (Adem, 2019). One of the income-generating activities they engage in is childcare support for families whose members are working. Most of these families include nuclear and single-parent families, particularly in the low-income settlements in the urban areas (Muendo, 2014).

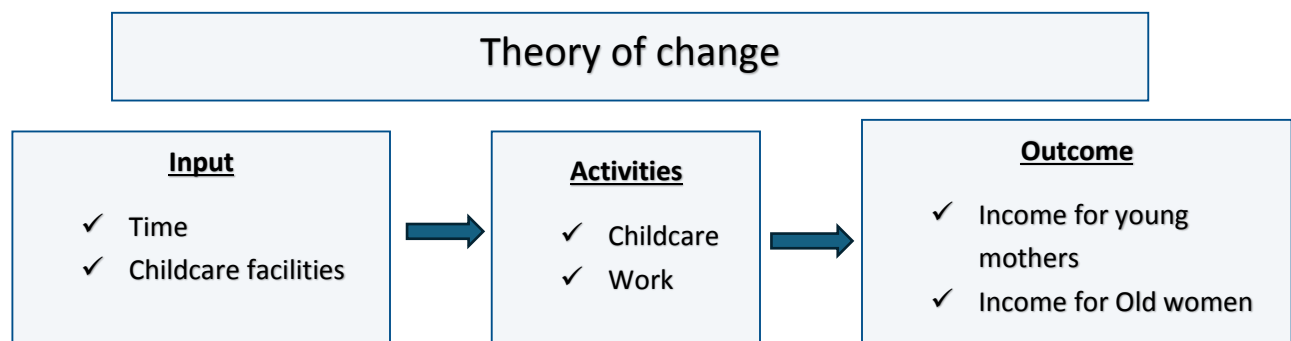
2.4 Theoretical Framework

This subsection highlights the theoretical framework that was adopted by the study.

2.4.1 Theory of Change

This study was guided by the Theory of Change, which explains how interventions bring an outcome. The theory was founded by Carol Weiss in the 1970s and 1980s. Weiss argued that focusing on processes and mechanisms that lead to desired outcomes is critical. In this study, the process of enhancing childcare without interfering with work using the most effective methods in society is critical (Weiss, 2018). The process of identifying the most effective means of childcare without affecting working productivity is key. Young women are able to progress with their work while children are being taken care of by the childcare support systems.

The chart below represents the flow of the theory of change as used in this study.



2.1 Methodology

The study was conducted through an online questionnaire targeting Kiambu County and Thika Sub-County. A questionnaire was shared with the target persons, and data was collected online, signifying a non-probability sampling that targets selection based on convenience, allowing the researchers to collect data easily (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016). The purpose of the study was to get data from young and old women, and men who have information about childcare and the current supportive systems in relation to balancing between work and childcare (Campbell et al., 2020). This was cost-effective and convenient for data collection (Rai & Thapa, 2015). The method was chosen because of its ability to collect data with greater ease and speed compared to other methods. This was later analysed using the R program, and the data was presented as described below.

4.1 Data Analysis and Presentation

The study's objectives were achieved through an initial data collection that gave the details and outcome of the study. The data was analysed using the R program and presented using graphs, charts and figures for qualitative and quantitative data.

4.2 Demographic Traits of the Respondents

This subsection presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. These include gender, age, marital status, number of children and employment status. This was necessary to allow generalisation of the findings to the population under study and make comparisons with other studies.

4.2.1 Gender of the Respondents

This study sought to collect data from both male and female respondents. Figure 4.1 shows the gender results of the respondents.

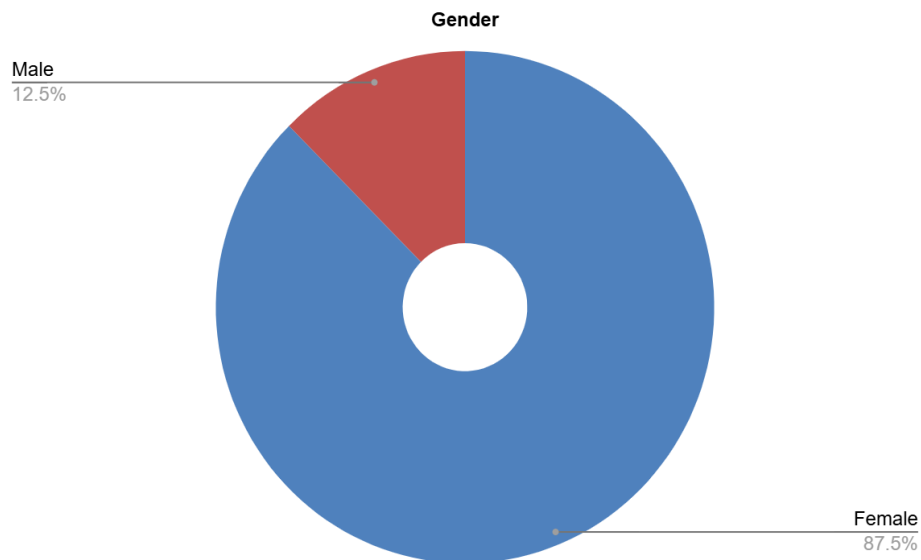


Figure 4.1: Gender of the respondents

Figure 4.1 shows that the female respondents were the majority indicated by 87.5% while the males were only 12.5%. A study by Muendo (2014) showed that in majority of the indigenous Kenyan societies, childcare responsibilities were solely left to women. This arrangement has continued even today where childcare duties are left to women.

4.2.2 Age of the Respondents

The study sought to establish the age pattern of the respondents and the findings are presented in Figure 4.2.

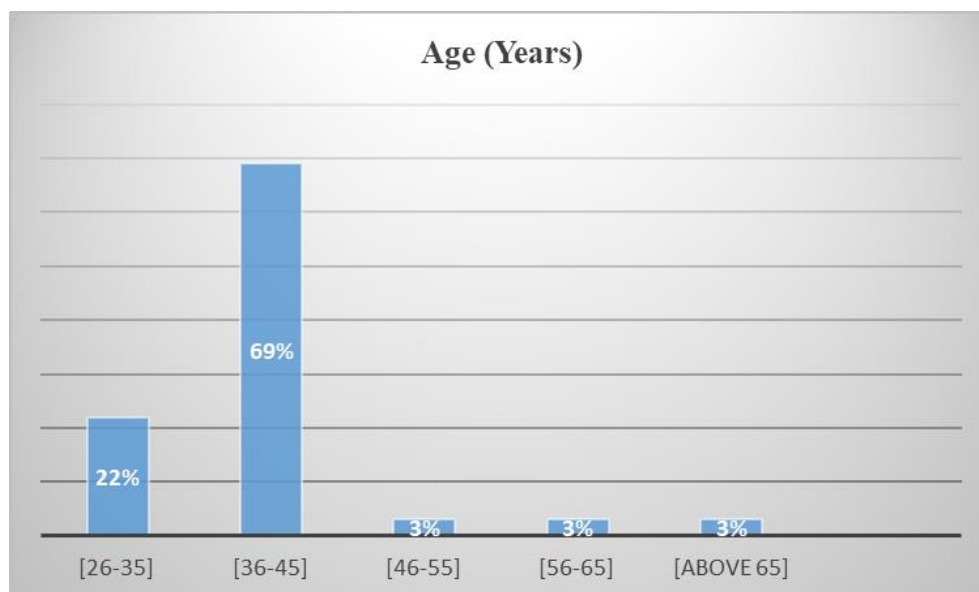


Figure 4.2: Age of the respondents

Based on the findings in Figure 4.2, most respondents were aged between 36 to 45 years, representing 69%, followed by 26 to 36 years which were 22%. Pestieau and Ponthière (2013) confirm the mode of the childbearing age to be between 25 to 29 years. However, schooling and work responsibilities have been shown to delay childbearing age. A study by Wu and Macneill (2002) indicated that, on average, the age of childbearing in developing countries had shifted from 20 to 27 years. Factors such as schooling and prolonged search for employment can be attributed to increasing delay in childbearing.

4.2.3 Marital Status of the Respondents

The study sought to establish marital status of the study respondents. Figure 4.3 presents the results of regarding the marital status of the respondents.

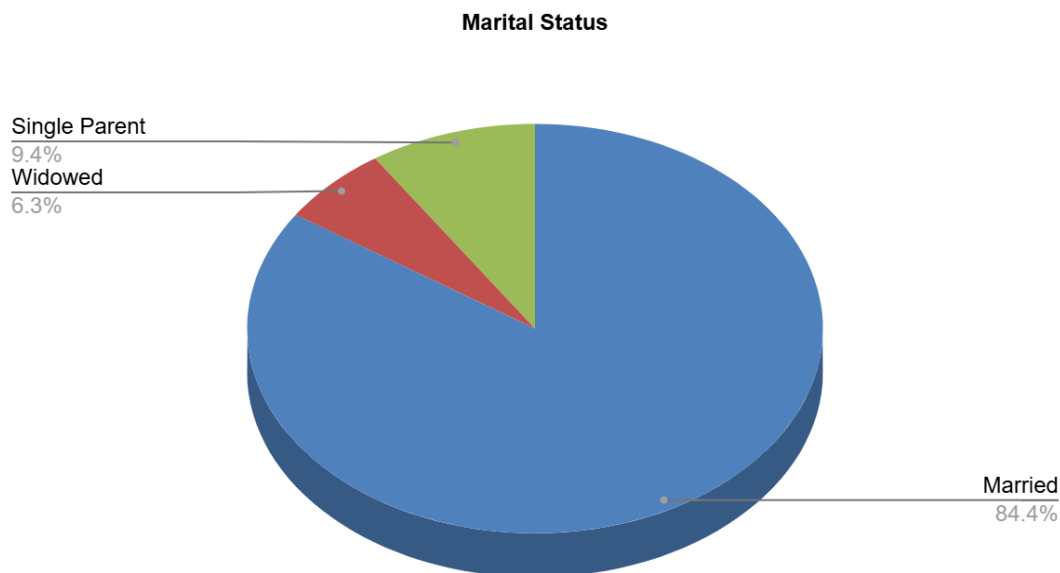


Figure 4.3: Marital status of the respondents

Based on the results in Figure 4.3, the majority of the study respondents were married. This is represented by 84.4%, single parents 9.4%, and widowed 6.3%. The study by Magri (2011) confirms that family patterns have changed, and children are raised in different familial arrangements, such as marriage, singlehood, or even by widowed parents.

4.2.4 Number of Children of Respondents

The study sought to establish the respondents' number of children. The results are shown in Figure 4.4.

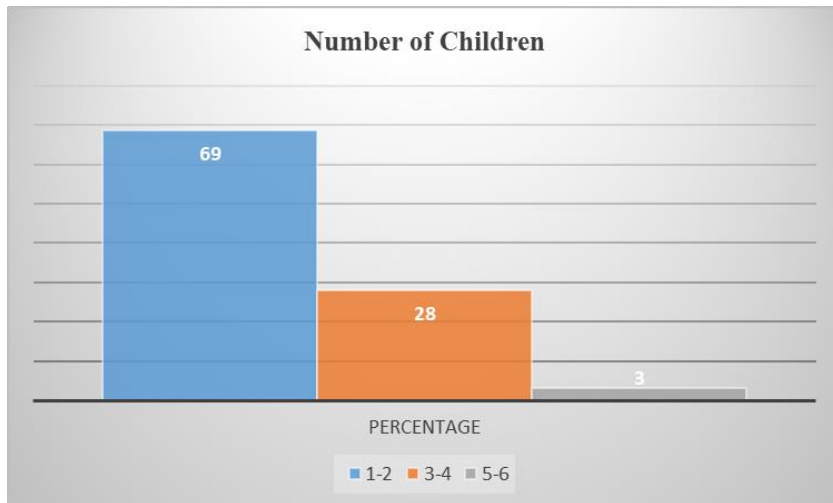


Figure 4: Number of children of respondents

Based on the results in Figure 4.4, the majority of the study respondents, represented by 69%, had between 1 and 2 children, 28% had between 3 and 4 children, and 3% had between 5 and 6 children. This is an indicator that families are having fewer children. A study by the American Psychological Association (2020) showed that the number of children per woman globally had dropped from an average of 4.7 in 1950 to 2.4 in 2020. This was attributed to factors such as employment, where more women were getting into formal and informal employment, thus reducing the number of children they had as they committed themselves to work.

4.2.5 Employment Status of Respondents

The study sought to establish the employment status of the respondents. The findings are shown in Figure 4.5.

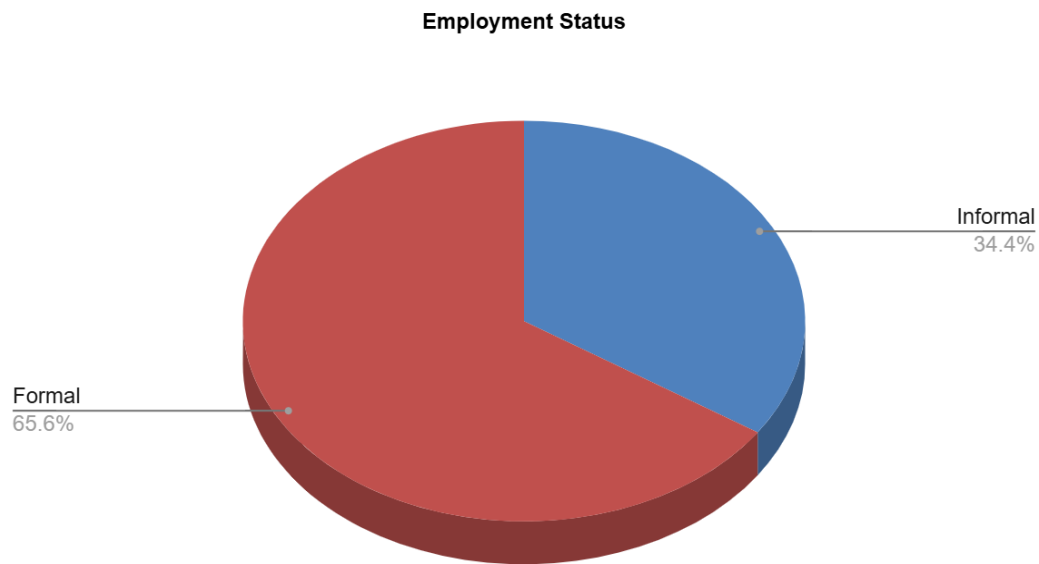


Figure 4.5: Employment status of the respondents

The findings in Figure 4.5 show that the majority of the study respondents, 65.6%, were in formal employment, while the minority, 34.4%, were in informal employment. This indicated that almost all the respondents with young children required help with childcare duties as they had committed themselves to work.

4.3 Study Findings on the Objectives

This sub-section presents the findings on the economic empowerment of young and old women, focusing on childcare work in Kenya. The section highlights variables including harmonising work with childcare duties, satisfaction with current childcare arrangements, the effect of childcare on occupation, society's expectations, and the benefits and challenges of older women in childcare duties.

4.3.1 Harmonising Work with Childcare Duties

The study sought to establish how respondents harmonised work with childcare. The findings are shown in Figure 4.6.

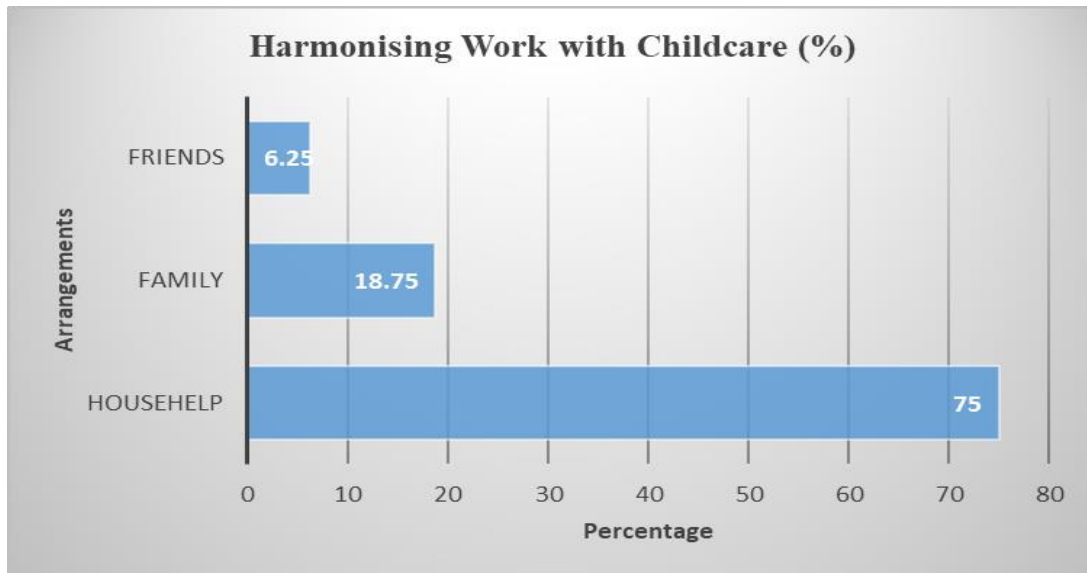


Figure 4.6: Harmonisation work and childcare duties

Results in Figure 4.6 indicate that the majority of the respondents indicated that 75% in the study relied on house help for childcare duties, 18.75% relied on family, while the minority, 6.25%, relied on friends for childcare duties.

Most respondents said they would prefer old women for household duties if given an opportunity. A study by Hein and Cassirer (2010) confirms that as more women get into employment, they make arrangements for childcare duties. The arrangements involve nannies, who, in this study, are house helpers. They also seek the assistance of family and friends.

4.3.2 Satisfaction with the Current Childcare Arrangement

The study sought to determine respondents' satisfaction with current childcare arrangements. The findings are shown in Figure 4.7.

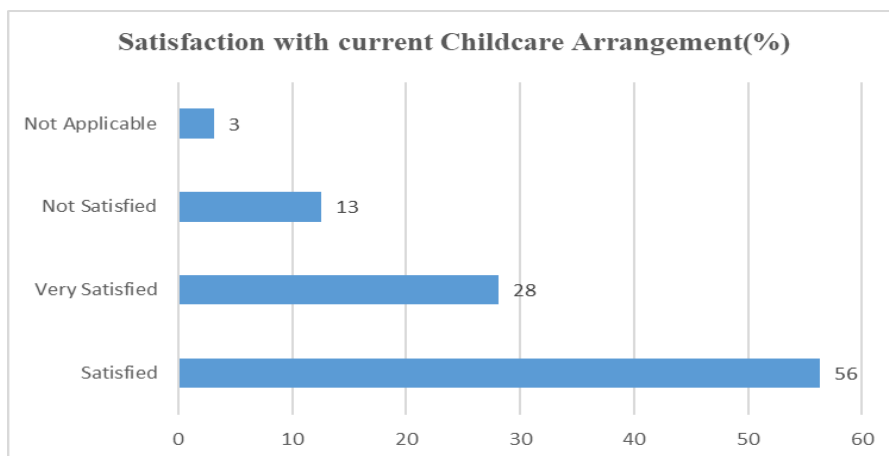


Figure 4.7: Satisfaction with current childcare arrangements

Based on the results in Figure 4.7, the majority of the respondents, 56%, indicated that they were satisfied with their current childcare arrangement, 28% indicated that they were very satisfied, and 13% indicated that they were not satisfied. The question was not applicable to 3% of the respondents.

The findings showed that some respondents were satisfied with their current childcare arrangements due to the security of their children, affordability and quality of the services. Those not satisfied with the current childcare arrangements cited high cost, low quality of services and fear that their children were not secure. Anderson and Levine (1999) write that satisfaction with childcare arrangements depends on a number of factors, particularly the quality of services provided. On the other hand, Muendo (2014) believes that women's financial background determines the quality of childcare services they get for their children. Women with higher incomes seek professional childcare services since they can afford them, while women with low incomes seek informal childcare services that are typified with low-quality services. Apart from the quality of services, the security of children is another concern for mothers. Mothers usually feel secure leaving their children in the care of relatives or someone they trust (Sitati et al., 2016).

4.3.3 Effect of Childcare on Occupation

The study sought to establish the effect of childcare on occupation. The findings are shown in Figure 4.8.

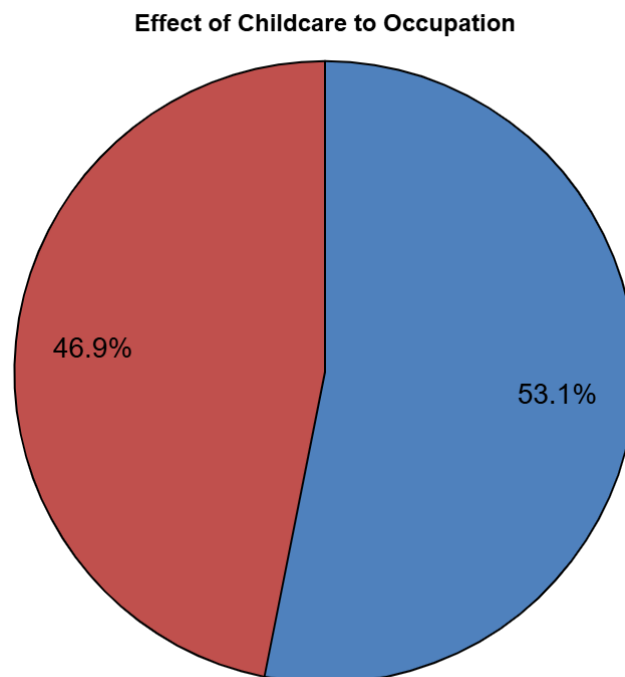


Figure 4.8: Effect of childcare to occupation.

Studies have shown that access to quality childcare significantly enhances parents' ability to participate in the workforce (Morrissey, 2017; Kim & Fram, 2020). In African contexts, limited childcare infrastructure presents additional barriers, where informal childcare systems are often relied upon but may lack reliability and structure. This gap affects women disproportionately, restricting their economic opportunities and perpetuating gender disparities in employment (Clark et al., 2021).

The findings in Figure 4.8 show that the majority of the respondents, 53.1%, indicated that childcare affected their occupation, while 46.9% indicated that childcare did not affect their occupation.

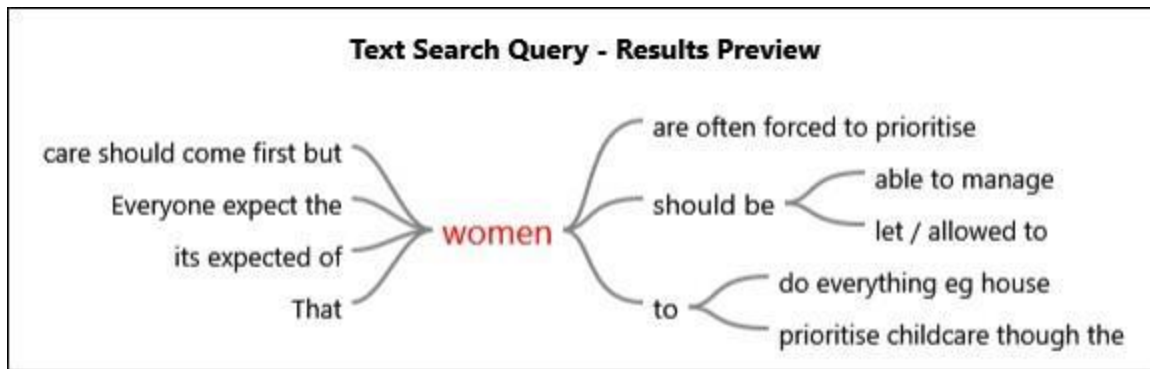
4.3.3.1 High Effect of Childcare to Work

The findings in Figure 4.8 show that over 53.1% of the respondents indicated their occupation was affected by childcare duties. They wish to spend enough time with the child but the demands at the workplace are higher. They feel disturbed at work worrying about the children, especially where health issues are concerned. As seen earlier in this study, most parents hire house help (75%) whose turnover is higher and thus the bonding is poor. Getting good house help was also recorded as a challenge. Respondents with young children tend to have many challenges at work to the extent that the management or colleagues notice. This includes absenteeism at work due to duties that only the parent must attend to. There is fear that when there are too many challenges, one can lose a job. This makes one physically present at work but with poor productivity due to the thought about the wellbeing of the children.

4.3.3.2 Less Impact of Childcare to Profession

Further, the findings in Figure 4.8 indicate that 46.9% of the respondents are not affected by childcare in their profession since they work from home, which allows them to monitor the children. *“I work from home, so I am able to monitor the baby”*, a respondent commented. Others are self-employed and thus able to plan for both work and childcare, *“I am self-employed and am able to meet their needs”*. Various reasons emerged that showed parents had little worry about their children's care. Older children require less attention, are responsible, and can aid in duties at home. Young women living with their biological mothers in the same household registered fewer worries.

Qualitative Data



4.3.4 Society's Expectation

Figure 9 shows the findings on society's expectations of women with regards to childcare duties.

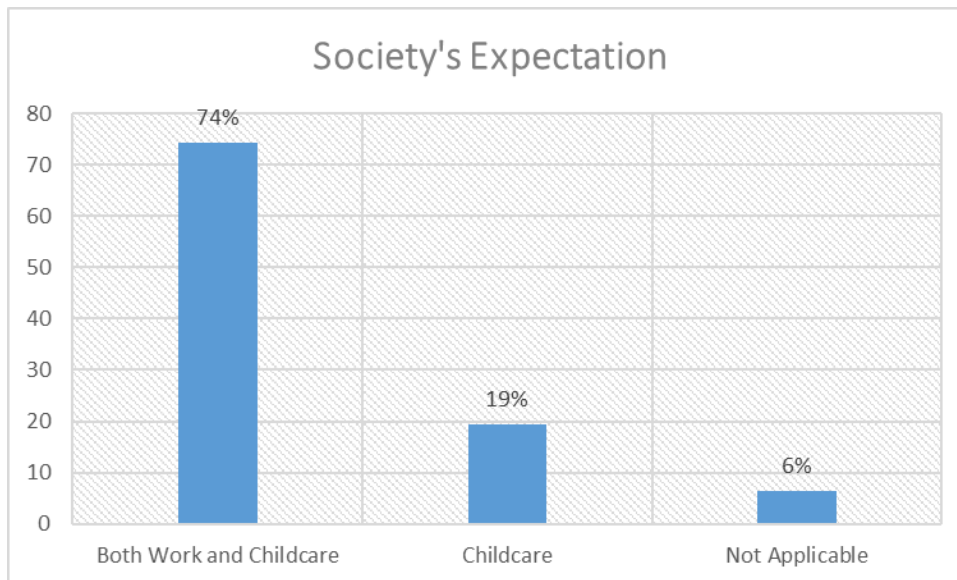


Figure 4.9: Society's expectation

Based on the findings in Figure 4.9, the majority of the respondents, 74%, indicated that society expects women to work and engage in childcare duties. 19% indicated that society expects women to undertake childcare duties only, while the question was not applicable to 6% of the respondents.

The results imply that women, rather than men, are expected to take up childcare responsibilities. Some of the respondents said that traditionally, this has been the case in their community, where they are socialised from an early age that childcare is the responsibility of women. The findings are supported by numerous research showing that society expects women to work and at the same time take care of childcare responsibilities or simply take childcare duties (Downs, Costin & McFadden, 1996; Matagaro, 2005; Kariuki & Nelson, 2006; & Muthuri, 2019).

4.3.5 Benefits of Older Women in Childcare

The study sought to establish why older women are preferred in childcare. The findings are shown in Figure 4.10.

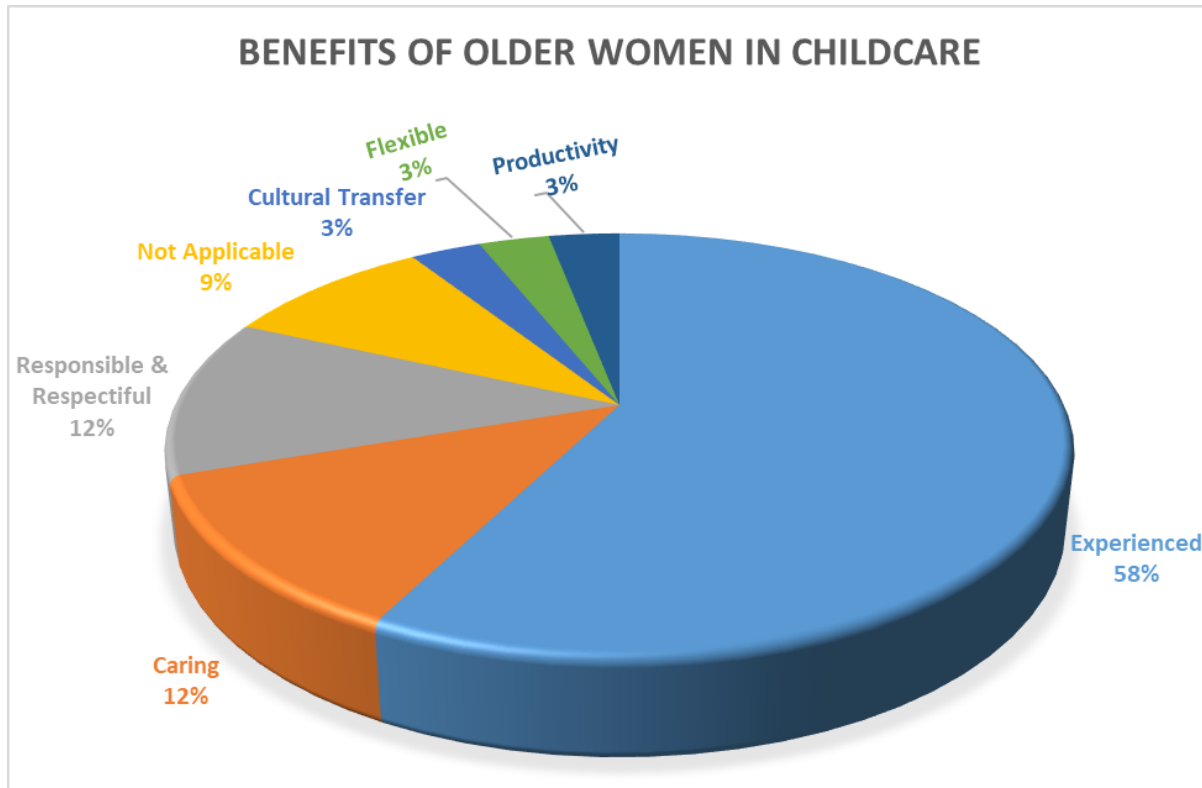


Figure 4.10: Benefits of older women in childcare

Based on the findings in Figure 4.10, most respondents indicated that they prefer older women because of their experience. Twelve per cent indicated that older women are caring, another twelve per cent indicated that older women are responsible and respectful, and three per cent cited cultural transfer, flexibility, and productivity, respectively.

A study by Magri (2011) confirms that young mothers entrust older women with childcare services based on their experience in childcare duties and caring nature. Unlike younger women, older women have experience resulting from taking care of their own children and those of their relatives, friends, or even neighbours. They are, therefore, likely to use these experiences to provide better childcare services and get paid.

4.3.6 Challenges of Older Women in Childcare

The study sought to establish the challenges faced by older women in childcare. The findings are shown in Figure 4.11.

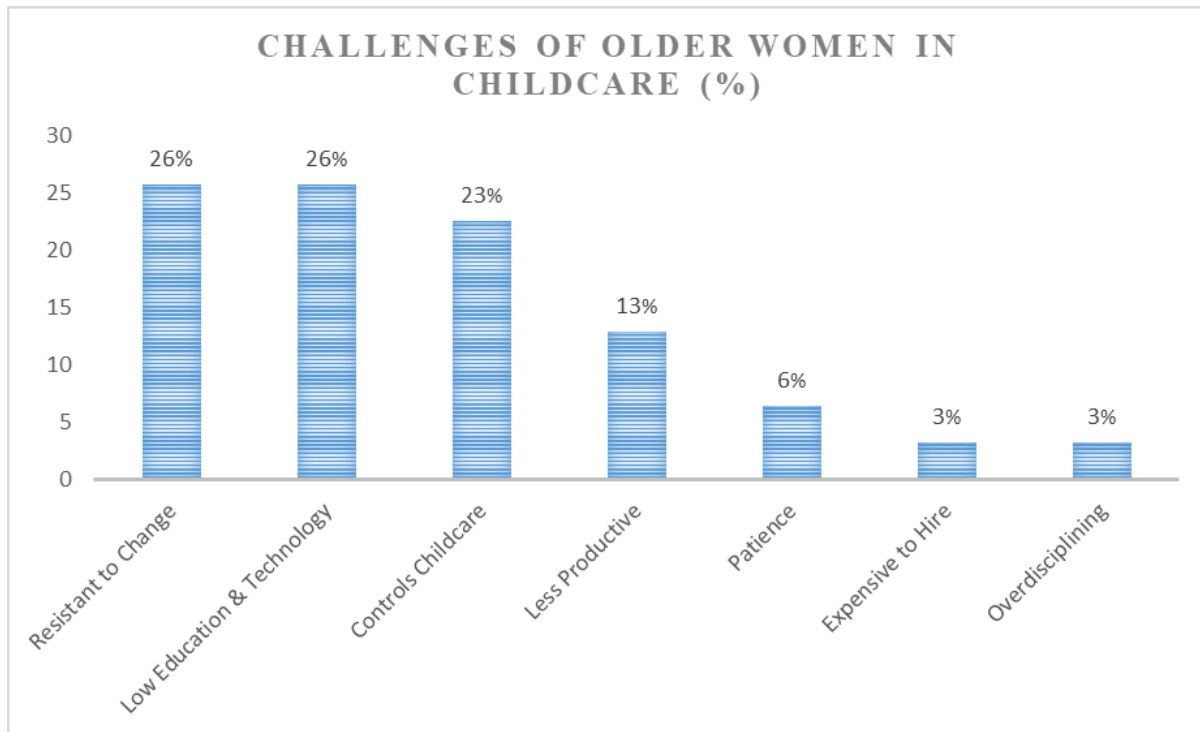


Figure 4.11: Challenges of older women in childcare

The findings in Figure 4.11 indicate that the majority of the respondents, 26%, were of the opinion that older women are resistant to change. Another 26% cited low education and technology, 23% indicated controlling childcare as a challenge, 13% indicated that they were less productive, 6% cited patience, and 3% each indicated that they are expensive to hire and over-discipline children, respectively.

The reluctance of older women to resist change has been confirmed by other studies that suggest this change is influenced by factors including lower digital literacy, concerns about data privacy, and limited exposure to digital tools earlier in life (Vaportzis, Giatsi Clausen, & Gow, 2017). Ademi (2019) is of the opinion that intergenerational differences between older and younger women play out during their interactions. In Indigenous family settings, older women lived together with younger women in the same homesteads and were instrumental in imparting societal values to young women. This lessened the burden of the intergenerational gap as both old and young women learnt to co-exist with each other. Due to the disruption of family arrangements, the intergenerational gaps between older and younger women have become more pronounced. Older women are likely to hold on to the societal values that dominated when they were being brought up as younger women embrace new changes brought by globalisation.

4.4 Summary and Conclusion

The study was conducted in June 2024 and targeted Kiambu County in relation to the symbiosis of young women's childcare done by other supportive systems and their work. There were 37

respondents. Data analysed on the demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that the majority of the respondents at 87.5%, were female while 12.5% were male. Regarding age, the majority of the respondents, indicated by 69%, were in the age bracket of 36-45. Marital status stood at 84.4%, showing that most respondents were married while others were single and widowed. Regarding the number of children, most respondents (69%) had between 1 and 2 children, while 28% had between 3 and 4 children. All the respondents were in employment, with 65.6% being in formal employment while 34.4 were in informal employment. Data analysed on the symbiosis found that elderly women provide childcare services to young, productive women at a fee. Young women rely on diverse childcare arrangements. Particularly, the study established that most of the respondents (75%) relied on house help for childcare needs to harmonise work and childcare responsibilities. Other childcare arrangements included family (18.75%) and friends (6.25%). Also, the study determined that most respondents were satisfied with their current childcare arrangements. Most respondents indicated that they would prefer old women in childcare because of their experience. Other reasons cited for preferring old women with childcare duties included their being caring, responsible and respectful, flexible, productive and for cultural transfer. However, respondents also indicated that there were challenges associated with old women regarding their relationship in childcare work. Challenges cited included resistance to change, low levels of education and technology, less productivity, patience, being expensive to hire, and over-disciplining. It was also noted that older women are difficult to instruct, given their age differences from the younger women.

Young women's work is greatly affected by childcare, and the availability of well-structured older women's childcare would create an opportunity for both women in terms of productivity and economic benefit, thus resulting in higher gross domestic product (socioeconomic empowerment). This is in tandem with the Theory of Change, which emphasises understanding the processes and mechanisms that lead to desired outcomes in enhancing childcare in ways that do not compromise work productivity, ensuring young women can effectively fulfil their work roles while their children are cared for through supportive childcare systems (Weiss, 2018).

4.5 Recommendations

Participants have recommended methods to enhance the relationship between young mothers and older women in childcare without affecting their work duties. As much as there are some benefits, some respondents feel that the mother can only give the best care, especially for character development. In contrast, others feel it is therapeutic for older women to watch over a young baby. Others see it as a concept that can work well, especially when there is mutual respect between the two parties, capacity building for both parties, and good remuneration, and this requires to be formalised before being rolled out to mothers, *“Older women should give a listening ear to young women as well and should not always think young women are always naive and always wrong”*.

In relation to house helps, some respondents feel it is safer when the child is being taken care of by an older woman. It is important to sensitise young women so that they can see childcare as an

opportunity, coupled with proper remuneration, thus socially and economically empowering both parties.

Regularising informal childcare in Kenya by providing structured guidelines and a capacity-building curriculum would enhance this sector's quality of care and professionalism. Establishing standards and structured training in areas like healthcare, child development, child psychology, and safety measures would equip caregivers with essential skills to provide high-quality, safe, and nurturing environments for children. Such an approach would ensure that caregivers understand and implement best practices in safeguarding children, promoting their health, and fostering their social and cognitive development. Revising the National Pre-Primary Education Policy and the National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework to include fundamental life skills and professional service training within a structured curriculum would contribute to recognising and respecting informal childcare providers as a legitimate profession. Such an initiative would foster dependable and uniform care, facilitate the comprehensive development of children, and provide working parents with enhanced reassurance regarding their children's well-being.

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