

# This Week's Citation Classic®

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Hoffman L W & Nye F I. *Working mothers*.  
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974. 272 p.  
[University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI]

*Working Mothers* is an integrative research review and analysis of the causes and consequences of maternal employment. The topics covered include the socioeconomic influences behind current patterns, the factors influencing individual decisions, and the impact of maternal employment on children, marriage, family structure, and the mother's mental health. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this book has been cited in over 165 publications.]

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If the book, *Working Mothers*, has become a "classic," I think it is because it has endurance. Research, particularly on topical issues, is often time-specific. Our book has avoided early obsolescence for three reasons. First, each chapter organized the data according to a theoretical scheme that was attuned to the influence of the social setting and focused on the underlying processes that explained the empirical relationships. The relationship between the mother's employment status and some other variable may be quite different at one period of time than another, and the only way we can generalize is to understand the connection between the two variables. Because the book provided this kind of theoretical framework for the study of maternal employment, it has retained its value over the years.

Second, each chapter was an evaluative review of all existing research on that topic. While the results of any single study may be flawed, the convergence of findings from different studies can produce more reliable generalizations. Furthermore, in this integration of findings, we tried to discern consistent patterns across studies, taking account of differences in populations and measures as well as the quality of the research.

Third, although the topic of the book, the employment of mothers, was a controversial issue, we took an objective, scientific stance. No attempt was made to draw premature implications for policy. If we had a social action goal, it was to educate the reader about interpreting scientific

results; we wanted to communicate about the specifications and qualifications that are necessary in drawing generalizations from empirical data.

Ivan Nye and I worked well together because of our mutual commitment to these three goals. We were from different disciplines, lived in different parts of the country, and did not know each other personally. We have seen each other only four times, each time briefly.

Yet *Working Mothers* was our second book together; 10 years earlier we had collaborated on *The Employed Mother in America*.<sup>1</sup> Our first contact was when I submitted an article based on my doctoral dissertation to *Marriage and Family Living*, of which Nye was the editor. The article was on the effects of maternal employment on family interaction.<sup>2</sup> In his letter accepting the article for publication, he invited me to participate in a symposium on maternal employment that he was organizing for a conference. At that conference, he suggested we collaborate on a book.

Our first book, published in 1963, included individual research papers, some by other researchers, as well as various introductory and integrating chapters. At that time it would have been impossible to write a book like *Working Mothers*, where every chapter reviewed a sizable body of research. Although *The Employed Mother in America* did include discussions of all of the existing studies, there was very little work of good quality on the topic except for the research papers included in the book.

This first book was well received and had a considerable impact on the research that followed. So did the increased employment rates and more liberal viewpoint that developed over the next 10 years. Originally, we only intended to revise the first book, but as we surveyed the vast amount of research that had been conducted since 1963, the new book took its present shape.

We are proud of both books. Our methodological criticisms of the prevailing maternal employment literature have, we feel, improved the quality of subsequent work. Our pleas for specifying the independent and dependent variables and for considering the intervening processes and limiting conditions have moved the work considerably beyond the old two-variable studies of the past. Our conceptualizations of maternal employment have been taken seriously. Recently, I completed several reviews of the maternal employment literature,<sup>3-6</sup> and I feel that the researchers not only cited *Working Mothers*, they read it.

1. Nye F I & Hoffman L W. *The employed mother in America*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963. 406 p. (Cited 155 times.)
2. Hoffman L W. Effects of the employment of mothers on parental power relations and the division of household tasks. *Marriage Fam. Living* 22:127-35. 1960. (Cited 45 times.)
3. -----, The study of employed mothers over half a century. (Lewin M, ed.) *In the shadow of the past: psychology portrays the sexes*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. p. 295-320.
4. -----, Maternal employment and the young child. (Perlmutter M, ed.) *Parent-child interaction and parent-child relations in child development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1984. p. 101-27.
5. -----, Work, family, and the socialization of the child. (Parke R, Emde R, McAdoo H & Sackett G, eds.) *Review of child development research*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985. Vol. 7. p. 223-82.
6. -----, *Work, family and the child*. Master Lecture Series publication, American Psychological Association. In press.