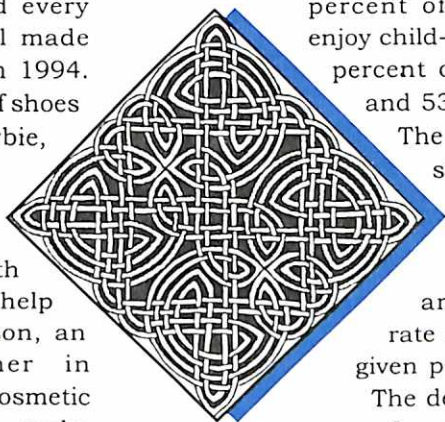


of her factory friends have died. Her head is almost bald and she breathes with great difficulty. After working at Dynamics for only a year, she started to develop problems: irregularities with her period, then headaches, memory loss, and now hair loss. Foek says she feels depressed and embarrassed, shy and ashamed of being sick. Most of these women make no eye contact; they are tired and weak.

Sunanta is interested in starting a movement because she believes that if she doesn't help the other workers, her life will have had no meaning. It is unclear if she will survive. Foek tells of her astonishment when he mentions that there are "two Barbies sold somewhere in the world every second, and that Mattel made more than \$3.2 billion in 1994. More than a billion pairs of shoes have been made for Barbie, many in Bangkok."

Foek, a freelance writer based in New York City, closes the article with these words: "I cannot help thinking of Cindy Jackson, an American photographer in London who has had 19 cosmetic surgery operations to make herself look like Barbie—at a cost of \$165,000. I wonder what would Jackson say if she could see these sick and dying women and know how brutally they have been exploited in order to make dolls for First World children. Pramitwa, Sunanta, and Metha [the workers interviewed] have never heard of Cindy Jackson, but my guess is they are glad not to be in her shoes. For them, it would be unbearable to live a life looking like a Barbie."

Source: Vera M. Britto of <fiatlux@umich.edu>, 4 April 1997



No, THANKS

by Sachiko Sakamaki

When she gave birth to her daughter two years ago, Noriko Ochiai gave up her job crafting jewelry. She suffered not only a big drop in income, but also had to cope with a sense of isolation and confinement, and an utter lack of time for herself.

"It doesn't matter what kind of job you had before or what kind of person you are," says Ochiai. "Once a woman has a child her life is totally changed."

More and more Japanese women seem to be reaching the same conclusion, that having children is no fun at all.

According to a 1994 Japanese government survey, only 22.6 percent of Japanese mothers enjoy child-rearing—against 71.6 percent of American mothers and 53.7 percent of Korean.

The result in Japan is a sharply declining birth rate: At 1.42 per woman, it's the lowest in the world and far below the 2.1 rate needed to maintain a given population.

The decline is casting a pall over Japan's future. As the number of children decreases, many fear the labor force will shrink and the economy will contract. In the long term, that could mean a decline in living standards. Noriyuki Takayama, a professor of economics at Hitotsubashi University, thinks the national birth rate will fall to 1.1—the current rate in Tokyo—simply because child-rearing has become too costly and unrewarding.

"Japan's population will be halved in 100 years at the current low birth rate," he wrote in the monthly magazine of the Keidanren, the country's main business lobby. "If children are

gone, Japan will perish."

Without doubt, Japan is the most modernized Asian nation. But some traditions die hard. "Women's employment opportunities have increased and women are better educated," says Mikiko Tanaka, who has covered two decades in her magazine, *Wife*. "But basic things haven't changed in the past 20 years."

Among the most basic is the placing of the entire responsibility for child-rearing on the mother. "The mother is blamed for everything," complains Fumie Taihei, mother of a two-year-old son in Kawasaki near Tokyo. When a child gets sick or doesn't start talking by a certain age, or fails to get into a good school, it's seen to be the mother's fault. Even though Taihei's salesman husband says he is willing to help her, he leaves home at 7:30 a.m. and comes home at 8 or 9 p.m. "Hardly any time is left for us to sit down and talk about our son," says Taihei, let alone to spend time with the boy.

Some Japanese fathers never learn how to change diapers, and many refuse to look after their children for even a few hours while their wives get a haircut or go shopping. "I bring home money," says a successful Tokyo banker, whose wife stays home to look after their newborn son. "So why do I have to change my baby's dirty diapers?"

Babysitters in Japan are professionals who make more than a mother might earn working part-time in a supermarket. So the mother ends up staying with her child all the time. "A woman has to change her priority from herself to her child," says Ochiai, the fulltime mother. "But men keep on living for their work."

Even working mothers feel distanced from their peers, though. Tomoko Asami went back

to her work at a Tokyo children's playroom when her older daughter was seven months old. Now, she suffers cold remarks from her colleagues when she leaves to pick up her two children. "I wish someday working moms could go home early without saying 'I'm sorry'," sighs Asami.

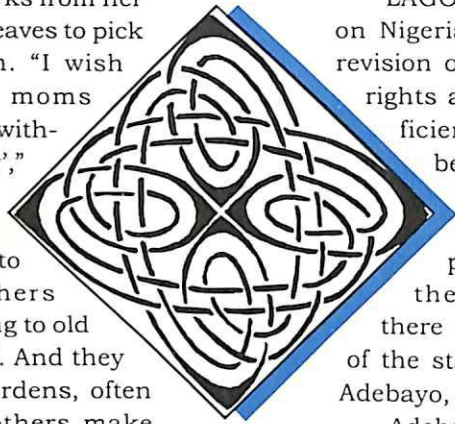
Nurseries set up by the government to help working mothers cope are run according to old ideals of motherhood. And they impose their own burdens, often demanding that mothers make highly specified bags for lunches and futon mattresses for the child's nap. Asami got her mother to help her with her second child's nursery bags; some mothers pay a department store to do it. Mothers must also keep a daily diary for the nursery, detailing the child's temperature, what he ate, and a comment about what he does every day.

The nursery system was set up in the 1960s, when the only working mothers were from poor families; the government encouraged husbands to work hard and wives who could to stay home.

Today's nurseries don't cater to the demands of the burgeoning number of working women who use them. They don't stay open long hours, for example, and many won't accept young babies. As a result, some mothers are forced to use two or three different daycare centers to keep their full-time jobs. And nursery fees, which run to more than U.S.\$500 a month in Tokyo's suburbs, aren't tax-exempt.

"To the working moms who are working so hard and paying tax," says Asami, "the system is so unkind."

Source: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 April 1997



LEGAL SILENCE ON WIFE BATTERING

by Remi Oyo

LAGOS, April 29 - The heat is on Nigeria's government for the revision of laws which women's-rights activists consider insufficiently stern against wife beating.

"Wife battering should not be permissible by the law. If the wave is increasing, there is need for amendment of the statute books," said Jide Adebayo, a civil servant.

Adebayo's position is shared by various non-governmental organizations and related associations that have begun canvassing for laws to curb wife beating to ensure full protection for women.

The Constitutional Rights Project (CRP) has recommended the adoption of a new law criminalizing domestic violence and urged that more NGOs provide data on violence against women, particularly domestic violence, to facilitate lobbying for the enactment of these laws and for litigation.

Violence against women here stems mainly from the widely-held perception of male superiority and the belief that men have the right to beat their wives.

"Wife beating is tolerated both socially and culturally. It is believed, though erroneously, that an erring wife should be brought back to the right path of life by beating her once in a while," said Ngozi Osarenren, a lecturer at the University of Lagos who has done research on women's issues.

According to the CRP, domestic violence is a "reflection of the power relationship between husband and wife. The husband derives power from being the supposed provider and head of the family. The power includes

coercive power which is often manifest in physical and mental subjugation through violence."

"Even if he is not able to fulfill his commitments, he still draws power from a society which holds men to be superior to women," according to the CRP's report, 'Unequal Rights' which details discriminatory laws and practices against women in Nigeria.

"Wife battering is regarded as a family problem to be settled in the privacy of the home" and is classified under common assault in the nation's criminal code, said the CRP report. "Not until grievous bodily harm is inflicted and, possibly the death of a victim, are the law enforcement agents willing to assist."

In northern Nigerian states, Section 55 of the Penal Code states: "Nothing is an offense which does not amount to the infliction of grievous hurt upon any person and which is done...by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife such husband and wife being subject to any custom in which such correction is recognized as lawful."

According to the penal code, grievous bodily harm includes emasculation, permanent loss of sight, ability to hear or speak, facial disfigurement, or joint, bone fracture or tooth dislocation and other life-endangering harm.

Few victims of abuse will seek legal redress as divorce is frowned upon. Cases of spousal abuse are most often reported by neighbors, and the wives who are bold enough to do so are usually referred to the Welfare Department of the Ministry in charge.

Statistics provided by CRP indicated that between 1982 and 1988, 1,220 cases of wife battering were referred to the Family Welfare Department in the midwest city of Benin, which has a population of less than one