

## Study on Working Mother Illustrated in Children's Picture Book "Mom, Do you think about me while at work?"

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### *Abstract*

*This study analyzed Eun-bi's mother, a working mom, appeared in "Mom, do you think about me while at work? (Kim Young-Jin, 2014)." At the first scene of the book, Eun-bi mother's morning seems so busy. Eun-bi's mother does everything for Eun-bi including brushing her teeth, washing her face, putting lotion on her face and wearing clothes in fast hand moves, because she have to go to work after sending Eun-bi to kindergarten. During way to kindergarten after busy preparation, Eun-bi got upset because she could not catch mom's fast walk even mom is walking with high heels. When Eun-bi's mother arrived at work, she remembered that she did not have a warm good-bye with Eun-bi so she called Eun-bi's teacher to ask how she was doing. Eun-bi's mother is busy due to hard work and can't stay with Eun-bi all the time, but she still loves her daughter as she thinks about Eun-bi by time to time and plans for the weekend to spend with Eun-bi. Maybe Eun-bi's mother is the one who is the most stressful between the role of being a mother and social position. Sometimes she will ask herself 'what am I working for?' and suffer by guilt when she looks at herself as a mother. In this study, children's picture book "Mom, do you think about me while at work?" is analyzed to find out the physical and mental difficulties of working moms in Korea where the distribution of responsibility for child care is insufficient and seek the fundamental method to solve the problems.*

**Keywords:** Working Mom, Rearing Stress.

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### **Introduction**

World renowned futurologist Alvin Toffler predicted that "The power of women will increase" at the 2007 World Women's Forum in Korea. According to his opinion, the rights and status of women will improve while women entering to highly developed industry fields from the traditional gender roles taking care of household affairs(Lee Yu-ju, 2016).

As Alvin Toffler expected, the rate of Korean women advancing into society is increasing and it reached 57 % in 2014 (National Statistical Office, 2015). In addition, rather than the purpose for the means of living, increasing women work for their self-realization. However, there was an unusual 'M' shape in the employment rate based on Korean women's age (Jeon Gi-taek, 2011). Social participation rate between age 25~29 reached 65.6% which is the highest employment rate but between 30~34 it decreased to 50.1% and

increased again after 40. Various advanced researches pointed out marriage, childbirth and child rearing are the main causes of career discontinuity particularly of the thirties (Choe Yun-jeong, Mun Sang-ho, Shin Chung-sik 2009; Lee Jin-suk, Choe Won-seok, 2011; Noh Seong-suk, Han Yeong-ju, Yu Seong-gyeong, 2012). Even if the women work in thirties, with their limited time, strength and resources, they have hardships between work and the family. This implicates that it is never easy to be a working mom caring their children and working at the same time.

Like this, Young-jin Kim’s picture book “Mom, do you think about me while at work?” is representing the working mothers in Korea.

During the busiest morning time, Eun-bi’s mom prepares breakfast and calls Eun-bi (Fig.1). Eun-bi’s mom is in hurry and got annoyed to Eun-bi because she was moving slowly. Eun-bi’s mom who goes to work after sending Eun-bi to kindergarten does everything including brushing her teeth, washing her face, applying lotion and putting clothes on for Eun-bi in a hurry (Fig 2, Fig 3). Even though Eun-bi can do it herself in her age, mother’s hurry made Eun-bi can’t do anything by herself. However, can we turn all faults to Eun-bi’s mom only?



Fig.1: Young-jin Kim, 2014



Fig.2: Young-jin Kim, 2014: 3



Fig.3: Young-jin Kim, 2014: 3

Title page

Eun-bi’s mom is busy due to morning meeting and the new work starting from this week. Eun-bi’s mom works well but sometimes she makes a mistake and hears unpleasant words from her boss. She checks time to have time with Eun-bi and works hard but she could not pick up Eun-bi from the kindergarten due to lots of work.

Perhaps Eun-bi’s mom may be one of the most stressful people between the social role and mother role. Sometimes she will ask herself what is she working for and feel guilt by judging herself as a mother. Ui-jin Shin(2014) who wrote “How it is like to live as a working mom in Korea” describes working mom as walking on a dangerous tightrope between work and family or mother and child. It explains how much it is hard for women to work when they become mother. There are various policies to understand and help the difficulties of working moms compared to the past, but we cannot deny that the lives of working moms are busier and harder than anyone.

Then, is quitting work for their child can be a solution? These days, the topic of married women in their 30s-40s is ‘work and family’ or ‘work and child care.’ Working moms are difficult doing both work and child care, and full time mothers feel anxiety because they think they are not good enough raising their child even though they put everything into child care. However, one thing that is different from the past is that there are no mothers who are totally free from work whether they are working now or not. In other words, many full-time mothers are living as ‘potential working moms’ who are willing to work again when their children reach the upper grade of elementary school.

However, the issues of childcare is not only limited to Korea. In the European Parliament held in 2010, Licia Ronzulli, a female lawmaker, received the media attention. The reason is that she attended the vote with her 6 weeks old daughter. She said “I came here with my daughter for all of the women who cannot carry out pregnancy and work, and social life and housework together. And since then, she attended to the Parliament with her daughter for over 3 years. Another example is the 42 year old Spanish woman Carolina Bescansa, a member of Parliament, who brought a five months old baby and breast-feed at the first meeting of the Parliament. She said to reporters “There are millions of unfortunate mothers in this country who cannot raise their children as they want. They are the mothers who cannot go to work with their children. And I think it tells a lot about this country that bringing a breast-feeding child to the Parliament becomes a news story. This means that we need to make this issue more public.”

Thus, the problem of child care caused by the advancement of women into society is no longer a category that can be solved within the family. It became a shared goal which a whole nation should solve together because it is linked to social problems such as low fertility.

In this study, children’s picture book “Mom, do you think about me while at work?” is analyzed to find out the physical and mental difficulties of working moms in Korea where the distribution of responsibility for child care is insufficient and seek the fundamental method to solve the problems.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study analyzed Eun-bi’s mother, a working mom, appeared in “Mom, do you think about me while at work?(Kim Young-Jin, 2014).” This picture book is written at children’s level to easily understand the daily work of mom. At the left side of the book it shows the daily life of mom at work and at the right side is shows the day of Eun-bi at kindergarten in time order to compare their day. First, this study analyzed the script and picture of the book to indicate noticeable characteristics of working mom shown through the life of Eun-bi’s mom and also analyzed role conflict between the life as a worker and as a mom. In addition, this study also found other methods to effectively combine work and family by systematically researching literatures such as home and abroad thesis, academic journals and books.

### **If mother was at home, would not be their child sick?**

#### **Mothers feeling guilt**

Eun-bi’s mom cannot pick up Eun-bi from kindergarten because of busy work. Instead, she calls to Eun-bi’s grandmother and asks her to take care of Eun-bi. However, she could not breathe easily. Last year, Eun-bi got hurt by a bicycle accident on the way back from kindergarten. If Eun-bi’s mom was there at the time, would not Eun-bi be hurt?

When child is sick it breaks every mothers’ heart. In particular, when the working moms hear their children is sick it makes them to panic. Their panic does not end after they found a person to take care of their child, took a vacation and found a way to cure their child. The worst chaos will probably happen inside those mothers. Guilt and self-depreciations thinking, ‘I have been careless about my child while focusing on work. That’s why my child is sick.’, ‘If I took care of my child a little more, my child would not have been hurt.’ or ‘I am disqualified to be a mother.’ will cover mothers heart. Every mother who raises children experiences small or big guilty feelings. There are two main types of guilt that mother experiences. One is the guilt from a basic instinct thinking ‘I should be responsible of my child’ and the other one is judging oneself according to social standard and feeling guilt by themselves (Ui-jin, Shin 2014).

On the busy Monday morning, Eun-bi's mom need to go work after sending Eun-bi to kindergarten, but Eun-bi won't get up not knowing mom's impatient situation. Eun-bi did not want to get up, eat and go to kindergarten. Eun-bi's mom did not know Eun-bi's mind and just urged Eun-bi to move quickly.

"Mommy is busy to go to work after taking you to kindergarten."

"Mommy, can't you go to work today?"

Eun-bi's mom had no spare at her mind to read Eun-bi's heart and got angry to Eun-bi. After a frantic preparation sending Eun-bi to kindergarten, Eun-bi's mom could just get on the subway in time. While she was taking a breath she remembered one thing. She remembered that she even didn't say good-bye to her daughter. Why do we always regret after something happens? She calls to Eun-bi's kindergarten teacher feeling sorry after she arrives to work.

Heavy responsibilities and unnecessary guilt should not be given to mothers. All of the responsibilities are driven to mothers due to insufficient social system for child care. Furthermore, our society blames mother when a child is born with development disorders. There is too much burden on mothers from the pressure this society gives (EBS 'Mother shock' production team, 2012: 239). Korea society consciously or unconsciously tends to give the primary responsibility of child care and housework to mothers. So it seems that the guilty feeling of working moms is several times larger than that of full-time mother staying with children. Even though it is inevitable to take care of children, wife feels more guilt than husband and turns all faults to herself when any trouble happens to their children. Working itself gives mothers to feel sorry to their children and make them give up becoming a good mother.

We blame ourselves after saying harsh words to our children.

We blame ourselves again saying wrong words.

Blaming children for their wrong behavior is not good for children.

It gives us a little punishment just to ease the discomfort of our mind.

It is only for us after all. If it is for our children, blaming ourselves is not an answer.

Practice what to say to your children.

Practice new behaviors for your children. Then you can change.

Don't blame yourself for not being a good parent. Is there a good parent?

It is also hard to find good children.

One thing is obvious.

If you love each other even the immature parts, it is a good family (Cheon-seok Seo, 2013: 226).

Working moms receive role pressure from each field of work and family experiencing physical and psychological problems caused by the decrease of satisfaction and stress from life, marriage and family relations while suffering conflicts between each role (Ja-myeong Lee, 2013). However, how can we always live a satisfying life and become competent worker and a good mother at the same time? Regardless of whether mother is at home or at work, children can get sick and big and small events can happen. Only, rather than being drowning in guilt when a problem occurs to the child, it is wiser to consider 'what can solve this problem?' and acknowledge the insufficient parts of children, mother and father trying to fill those parts together.

### **How can we break good mom complex?**

#### **It is okay if you are not an A<sup>+</sup> mother -**

People generally think that a good mother is a mother who always cares for her children's needs while staying with their children. However, British pediatric psychologist Donald Winnicott indicated that

children need ‘moderately good mom’ rather than ‘good mom. A ‘perfectly good mom’ that satisfies children’s needs is rather an obstacle to the children’s learning of new behaviors and skills. Under ‘moderately good mom’, children learn ability to endure frustration and method to live an independent life when their needs are not all satisfied. In addition, various previous studies (Yeong-ha Park, 2004; Eung-im Park, 1995; Mi-ja Jang, 1998) suggest that when a baby first establishes attachment to the world, it is not limited to a particular mother, but to two or three primary caregivers. In other words, it will be the best when the primary caregiver who takes care of the baby for three years from the birth is the mother, but even if the primary caregiver is not the mother, it does not affect the baby’s emotions and intelligence.

When Eun-bi’s mom arrives at work, she starts her day turning on the computer and checking the e-mails received during the weekend. She has no spare time while taking care of the works received by phone calls and preparing materials and document for the meeting held on every Monday morning. However, ironically, she has a smile in her face even in this busy daily life (Fig. 4, 5).



Fig.4: Young-jin Kim, 2014:12



Fig.5: Young-jin Kim, 2014: 24

Obviously, Eun-bi’s mom is satisfied with her life as a working woman and enjoys working. However, why is she always thinking that she is not being a good mother on child care?

What working moms should remember is that they do not have to think of themselves as ‘I’m not a good mom’ based on the standards they have set and the society set.

Eun-bi’s mom could not finish her work yet even it was time to leave work. However, she did not want to call home again that she will be late. At that time, a call from Eun-bi’s grandmother came and asks where is Eun-bi’s rabbit pants. She said she can’t find that pants but Eun-bi wants to wear it, but Eun-bi’s mom got irritated and said “Mom! There will be somewhere if you just look around! (Fig. 6)” Eun-bi’s grandmother just asked where to find the rabbit pants, but why did Eun-bi’s mom reacted like this? From the morning, she was thinking that she was not a good mother to Eun-bi. She could not have a warm good-bye to her daughter, she could not pick up Eun-bi from the kindergarten and she even have to do overtime work. Mom’s heart feels as heavy as a stone. Is it because of sorry feelings and guilt or sense of shame being unable to bear the role of mother without difficulties? The irritation of herself transferred to Eun-bi’s grandmother who could not find a rabbit pants and who was the closest to her, her mother. Sure enough, Eun-bi’s mom regretted just after she hang up the phone. She looks herself in the mirror and wants to cry because she was so sorry to her mom and her daughter.



Fig.6: Young-jin Kim, 2014: 28

In fact, when a working woman goes through pregnancy and childbirth and becomes a working mom, she experiences sudden changes in her life due to her new family members. Working moms experience increased anxiety and various stresses by being explored to insufficient socio-cultural atmosphere on the distribution of responsibility of child care burden and difficulties between work and family (Ja-myeong Lee, 2013). These stresses have a negative impact on social development of women and make women to suffer inferiority complex that they are not doing well as a mother.

However, whether working mom or full-time mom, child care is originally imperfect. Mothers will fall into Super woman complex, if they try to be perfect. In order to do so, the desire to receive A+ from all area should be lay down.

All works cannot be done by oneself. There is no one who has two full-time jobs.  
Superwoman is the adversary of the women's movement (Gloria Steinem, 2012).

#### **Can we have our cake and eat it?**

##### **Needs father's help -**

"I learned childcare from work." The title alone gives working moms a sigh of relief. This book is about childcare management know-how by Yeon-jeong Kim and In-a Jeong (2015), who has 16 years of working career in a global company, stating that women who are good at childcare also are good at work and introducing a synergy childcare method, 'Do less and raise better' of leader moms. The author sublimate heavy responsibility of mother and wife into working pleasure and provides wisdom to working moms by applying management know-how and social experiences they have learned in the company at home, so that they can have win-win at home and work. In other words, the author provides practical alternative rather than an empty message like 'cheer up working moms'.

If so, how can we take care of work and childcare together?

I was always worried when I come back from business trip. I often argue "Why do we always have problems when I'm out? Why is it only me who takes care this house?" to my husband. It was not an argue that I wanted to enjoy the freedom of mother. It was about the 'one-parent childcare system' which is too dependent on mother (Yeon-jeong Kim, In-a Jeong, 2015: 76).

It was the same in Eun-bi's home. From the beginning to the end of the picture book, you cannot find a trace of Eun-bi's father. Eun-bi's mom prepared breakfast, washed Eun-bi, put on clothes and send Eun-bi to kindergarten alone. Fortunately, with the help of Eun-bi's grandmother, Eun-bi's mom had a place to lean on. Where was Eun-bi's father?

Working mom should keep in mind that they should never make their husband an onlooker. There must be a partnership. Most husbands tend to think that their job is to just work hard for their family. Working moms need a husband who will share their burden they handle alone as a worker, wife and mother. In fact, wives are afraid to reveal their hardships because they think their husband might get angry and make them quite their jobs, or they don't even expect because they will hear an empty answers and go back to their repeating life just hearting their feelings.

However, the current generation is changing into a society where fathers getting involved in childcare compared to the past generation. Various childcare TV programs such as 'Where are you going dad?', 'Superman returns', 'Oh my baby', etc. shows father and children spending time together and making precious memories. Some say it is only possible for celebrities or it is far from the reality (Seung-u Han 2016). However, it is clear that these programs brought a positive change of perception on fathers participating in childcare (Mom & Infant, 2016).

Sheryl Sandberg, who accomplished the explosive growth of Google and Facebook, shared various advices and her experiences on 'Woman, work and leadership' in her book "Lean in". She said that a woman who is in the position of a leader must have a husband who fully supports her career. In other words, the emotional support of the spouse and the sharing of the childcare experience cannot be replaced by nanny, and even many mothers received help from good people while raising their children, they feel loneliness and depression due to insufficient 'emotional support and the sharing of childcare from their spouse'.

In addition, Brigid Schulte (2015) who is a writer of Washington Post and a mother of two children, introduced 'Third Path Institution' in Philadelphia in her book "Overwhelmed: Work, Love & Play when No One has the Time". Degroot who runs 'Third Path Institute' has consulted couples for more than a decade looking for a new way of life for their family. One of the three paths showing the image of a couple is the first path, a 'traditional family type', where one earns money and the other becomes a housewife. This type requires to choose only one between work and career. The second path is 'neo-traditional' families of dual earners with one breadwinner, usually the man, and one flexi- or part-time working spouse, usually the woman, who tends to be in charge of all the childcare and housework. And the third path is for couples who want to share their work and home lives as full partners, each one with time for work and free time. Degroot strongly encourages the third path in order not to be pressed for time of the life of modern people.

Denmark is the country where most of the couples are living in the third path. Denmark is one of the countries with the highest employment rate of working moms and over 80% of mothers with children under the age of 15 are working moms. How do Danish mothers and fathers enjoy leisure time while working together? Danish people place their priority on satisfying life. In Denmark, what they do in their spare time show their social position. In addition, they do not live to work. They concentrate on their work and goes home when things are done. They work 37 hours a week as a working standard and Danish men are equally involved in housework and childcare as their wives.

Danish sociologists and economists were confused when I said that the Americans still showed deep ambivalence about the American community survey asking 'Is it desirable for mothers with young child to work?'

One of them said, "If it was Denmark, there will be no such question like this." (Brigid Schulte, 2015: 352). Denmark was selected as the happiest country in the world according to the <World Happiness Report> which UN first published. Even though Denmark has the highest rate of sending children to nursery facilities, they took the top place in OECD's 'Happiness index' evaluation. In addition, birth rate of Denmark is high among other European countries.

If Korean fathers be equally involved in housework and childcare like the model of Danish fathers, working moms will be able to catch two rabbits of work and home at once. In order to do this, it is necessary to get away from conservative thinking that childcare should be the priority of mother and a social system that supports not only women but also men in childcare is needed.

## **Discussion**

This study attempted to analyze Eun-bi's mom, a working mom, appeared in the picture book "Mom do you think about me while at work?" by Young-jin Kim.

Eun-bi's mom is struggling to fulfill multiple roles at work and family in socio-cultural atmosphere in Korea where the responsibility for the burden of childcare is poorly distributed. In the process, Eun-bi's mom feels guilt about not being able to properly handle her role as a mother and falls into a sense of inferiority about not becoming a good mother.

In fact, it is physically and mentally impossible to raise a child entirely alone. Full-time housewife is impossible as well but working mom cannot even imagine.

In the past in Korea, a society was formed in a small village and had a large family which makes to raise children together. At home alone, there were many people such as grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who would take care of children. Even outside of the family, all neighbors were like family who could help. It was a world where children would not have to worry getting around the village all day. However, now it has changed a lot. Thankfully, the number of fathers who are helping to raise children has increased, but there is a shortage of time to participate in childcare, and more responsibility is placed on women for childcare and housework socially. In addition, it became more difficult to ask help to neighbors due to the spread of individualism and family selfishness.

The word, 'Country is responsible for childcare' is from the countries known as welfare countries such as France, Sweden, Finland, Germany, etc. The reason why these European leading welfare countries take responsibility is because of birth rate. To solve the serious low birth rate, the parental leave of not only mothers but also fathers became an obligation. Even in Germany, if anyone who are living with a baby, not only father but also uncle and grandfather can take a parental leave. This is because when economic and physical burden of mother are reduced, it is assumed that it will help to increase the birth rate having more babies.

In particular, when the child is 0~2 years old, the mother experiences more parenting stress because she has to take care of her child while she has to recover her body after giving birth. Mothers are tired mentally and physically due to childcare and have high psychological burden because they don't have a free time taking care of their young child. Age 0~2 is an important time for attachment formation, but it is a difficult time for mother with growing pressure of childcare. Working moms in Korea who do not want career discontinuity often go work not spending their whole parental leave. Working moms who did not have enough postpartum care goes to work and struggles with accumulated works. After finishing their work at

company they go back to home to do another work. And as the child grows, new tasks for the child appear again. Like this, childcare is an endless work.

The difficulties of raising children in Korean society naturally led to low fertility, and the government accepted it as a serious social problem presenting various policies to solve the problems. In other words, the government supports hospital costs incurred from pregnancy to childbirth to all pregnant women, regardless of income. In addition, flexible work schedule, parental leave and various childcare supporting policies are being implemented. However, it is still in its infancy and needs more complement. In particular, parental leave is a right and obligation specified in the law, but most of the parents cannot use it because the discretion of personnel matters is up to their company. In other words, although national policy is prepared, parents cannot receive practical benefits due to narrow-minded superiors who think profit is first than the welfare of employees. In addition, the government started Nuri curriculum for age 3, 4, and 5 since 2013 to help childcare and education. It expanded kindergarten and child care centers providing free education, but due to conflicts with institutions and lack of national budget, the childcare support policy is being shaken.

Therefore, socially a system that is applicable to the reality and makes fundamental childcare policy that could help to remove the burdens of working mom is needed, and personally mothers should be able to be free from the pressure of multiple roles at work and family and escape from the obsession that they should be good at everything. In addition, it is necessary for father and mother to communicate with each other to share duties in order to enjoy and make their children happy in a given situation and need wisdom to use all of the resources they can use around them.

Let's go back to the beginning.

You thought you would be happy when you became a mother, but the reality was harsh.

However, you did your best for your child.

It cannot be changed with anything and pleased you.

But, is it all of the happiness just satisfying as a mother?

A child makes mother happy, but also gives a stress.

There are many days to laugh, but it is also hard because of them.

One day, a child will grow as an adult and when they leave the nest, mother's life just revolving around the child may stumble.

You may do your best to be a good mom, but if you are not happy now, all of your efforts may burst like a bubble at any moment.

If you can enjoy a happy life as a woman before being a mother,

You can be a better mother.

A child looking at a happy mother will also resemble their mother.

Happy mother raises happy children (EBS Mother Shock production team, 2012: 220~221).

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