



Exploring the challenges in combining work and care for young children: Use of PhotoVoice with mothers from an urban Nairobi slum



African Population and Health Research Center

INTRODUCTION

In the informal urban settlements of Nairobi, as in similar communities throughout sub-Saharan Africa, a woman's ability to work and earn income is often limited by her responsibility to care for young children. For many women, regular employment depends on the ability to find safe and affordable day care. However, there is little research on how access to day care affects the ability to engage in income-generating activities, whether formal or informal.

The African Population and Health Research Center and McGill University are collaborating to investigate whether women living Korogocho, an urban slum in Nairobi, are better able to work and earn if they receive financial support for their children to attend day care.

What is PhotoVoice?

PhotoVoice is a qualitative visual research method which relies on the use of cameras by community members to explore stories, experiences, or ideas about a particular issue. Participants may also write short captions to further explain their photos, in capturing challenges they face or to explore possible solutions. The photographs serve as a visual "voice" that can shape narrative, with or without words, and tell often difficult stories in a meaningful way.

PhotoVoice helps researchers see "through the eyes" of those who are among the most marginalized in the research process, in our case, women in a low-resource environment. It allows participants to:

- document and record experiences and conditions around them
- critically reflect on the challenges or situations they face
- develop strategies to reach policy-makers

Consequently, the use of PhotoVoice may challenge prevailing views on how these women are seen by others, while also shifting how they see themselves as they narrate the stories behind the photos. PhotoVoice is a well-established approach to qualitative research.

The Power of PhotoVoice

Education and Empowerment: PhotoVoice seeks to raise awareness and develop critical thinking in an enjoyable and participatory way. In exploring an issue, participants are guided towards thinking critically about which photos best illustrate the challenges they face. The ensuing discussions can yield concrete suggestions for solutions that may respond to the social and environmental factors related to the challenges.

Participation: Through engaging marginalized or overlooked populations, PhotoVoice emphasizes that everyone has something important to contribute. When used with young people for example, it demonstrates that ensuring the rights of children and youth is critical to the development of societies. PhotoVoice also challenges traditional views of what counts as knowledge and who creates knowledge. The photographers are the experts of their own lives.

Bringing PhotoVoice to Korogocho

In 2015, women from Korogocho responded to two questions or prompts:

“How does child care affect your work?”

“What are some of the challenges and some of the solutions?”

Participants were divided into small groups and given digital cameras to take photos. They were accompanied by security guards who were well-known to them and made them feel safe as they navigated insecure parts of their community. The women generated over 100 photos, a selection of which were printed, and a narrative shaped around the images exploring their views and experiences of the challenges of balancing work and child care.



“Women in Korogocho illustrate their interpretation of the questions “how does child care affect your work, and what are some of the challenges and solutions?”



The PhotoVoice Process

The PhotoVoice process follows these steps:

- 1 Providing context on the issue or research topic under consideration
- 2 Discussing themes that could be illustrated in photos
- 3 Learning how to operate the cameras
- 4 Visual ethics, including the 'no faces protocol', that is, how to illustrate a situation without showing the faces of people or private businesses without permission and how to be sensitive to local contexts
- 5 Taking photos
- 6 Printing and looking at photos
- 7 Working in small groups to reflect on what the photos illustrate and creating captions to accompany them
- 8 Presenting reflections to the larger group and selected members of the community
- 9 Planning and preparing for exhibiting the work in communities, and to policymakers



Main themes arising from discussions in Korogocho

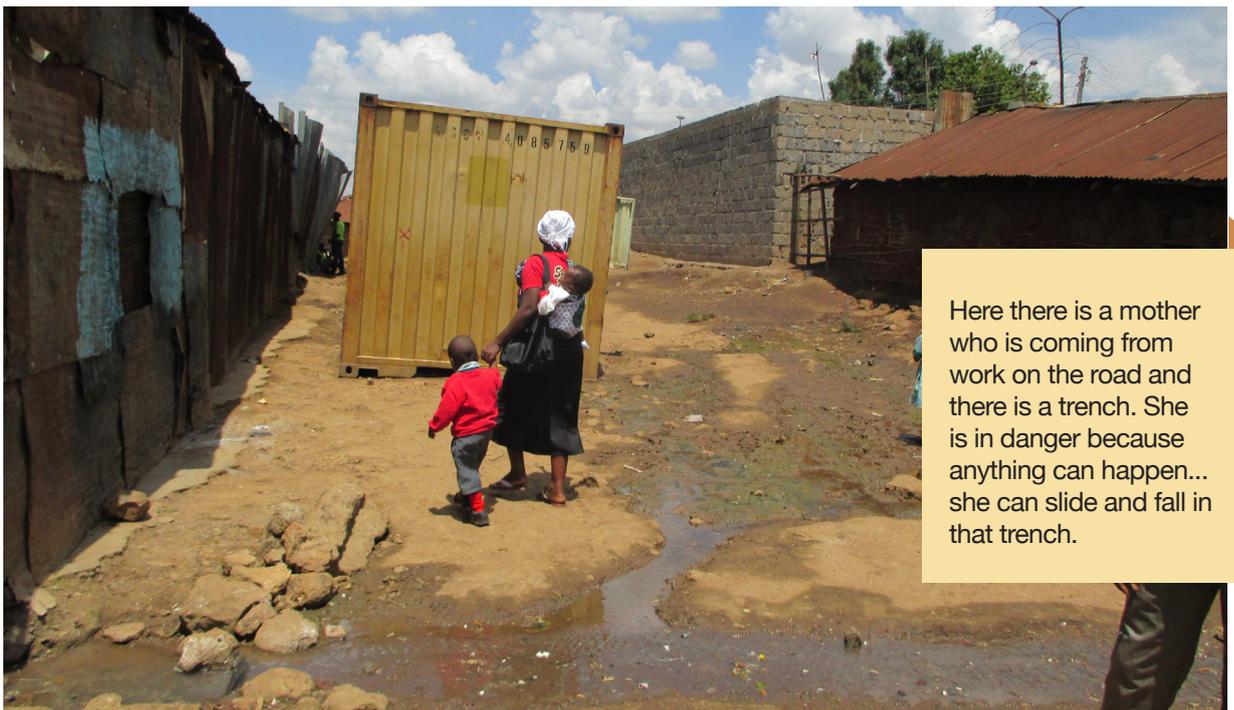
Workplace hazards and child well-being

preoccupied many of the women involved in the project, both at work and at home. Many women shared concerns about the congested nature of their work sites, which created workplace hazards. Another concern that arose repeatedly was the high risk of

injury for children while playing, and the physical or sexual assault their children faced from older kids and other adults. They spoke of how their meagre salaries were often used to pay medical bills to treat the injuries suffered by their children or themselves while at work or at home.

This village has become very congested. You can see there is this woman cooking 'githeri' (mixture of maize and beans) here... There is fire there where 'githeri' is being cooked.

There could be a child who has been sent to buy tomatoes and vegetables and the child gets burnt while passing there.



Here there is a mother who is coming from work on the road and there is a trench. She is in danger because anything can happen... she can slide and fall in that trench.

Economic insecurity featured prominently as an obstacle for most of the women. Many participants noted that a mother must work to have money for food even if she does not have someone to care for her children. And even if she does have a job or runs a small business, she may not make enough money for day care. In such cases, mothers make difficult choices to either bring their children to work, or leave them

unattended for the day. Each choice carries its own set of risks: children may be injured at the workplace or, if left unattended, may be harmed in some way by others. This double-edged sword of risk of harm and injury befalling their children is one of the most compelling justifications for the provision of affordable or free day care in low-resourced environments.

She [the mother] has left the child to sell the tomatoes as she goes to look for additional casual work... whatever income she is getting from that business is not enough to take care of these children. If she was supported with money so that she can start a bigger business or expand her business, she won't need to leave the child selling for the business to go and look for money elsewhere.



We have trash that is collected and it is put on top of the iron roof. There are children picking and putting stuff in a sack. Maybe the mother sent this child there, 'go and come back with lunch money,' because maybe the mother doesn't have an option and could not go to such a place. The child finds it simple to do this because there are other children.

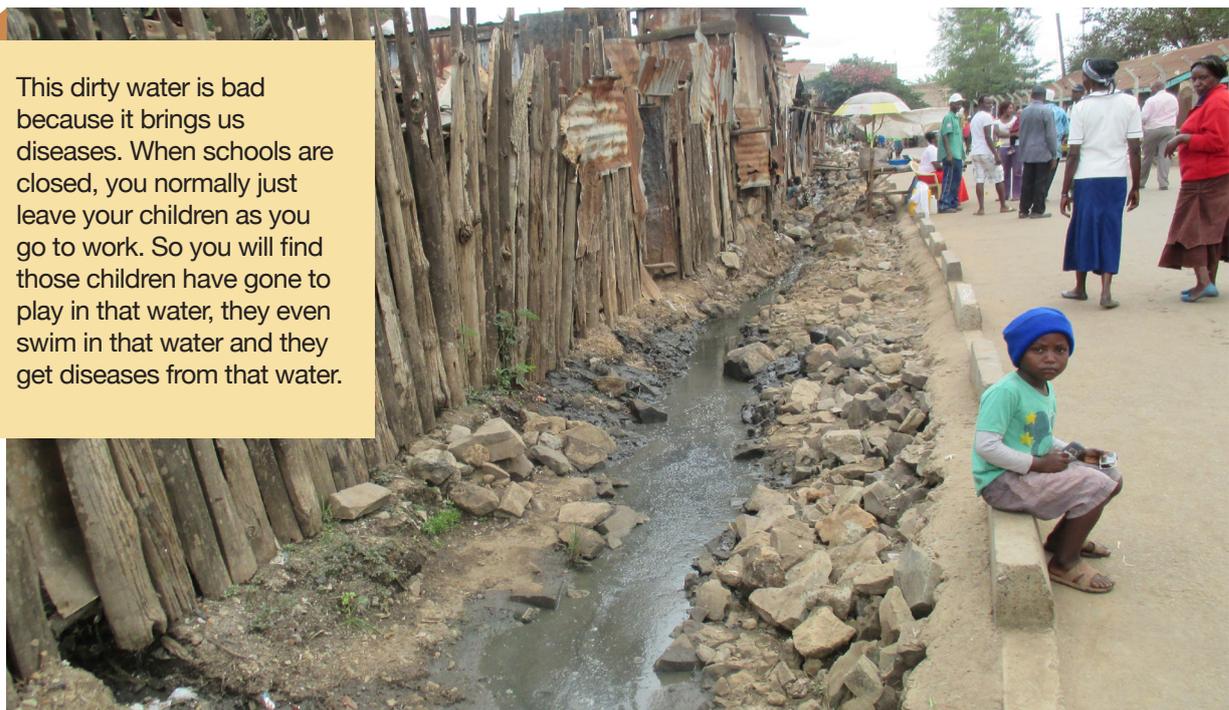


Environmental hazards also pose significant challenges to women in Korogocho, according to the participants. They expressed frustrations about their dirty surroundings, Whether it is that their children are playing in waste water or on the roads, or having to wash clothes or cook food near open sewage trenches,

environmental hazards and the ensuing health outcomes often result in costly medical treatments for families. These costs add up, preventing women from moving out of these compromised environments, or paying for child care.



This is a place where our children bring plastics and such things. They can be pricked by bottles... wearing no shoes where bottles and metals are dumped.



This dirty water is bad because it brings us diseases. When schools are closed, you normally just leave your children as you go to work. So you will find those children have gone to play in that water, they even swim in that water and they get diseases from that water.

Recommendations to address the obstacles women face in their daily struggle to balance work and child care

Financial Security and Day Care Provision

- Mothers, particularly those with many young children, need education-fund sponsorship for their children to attend day care.
- Women require access to low-interest loans to improve women-run businesses.
- Men should be involved in such conversations to give them a chance to learn the challenges women face in balancing work and child care.

Safety and Security

- Better allocation of land, and construction of spaces for business, including well-built and safe shelters that have water points and adequate lighting will improve business opportunities.

Environment and Health

- Free medical camps should be conducted to treat illnesses affecting children.
- Open ditches or trenches should be covered up since they are high-traffic areas for accidents, mostly affecting children.
- More toilet facilities should be constructed.

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Acknowledgments

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