

Movement Forming For 'Household Technicians'

By Associated Press

What quarter of a trillion dollar product never gets counted in the statistics of the gross national product? According to Gerda Lerner, founder of the Women's Studies Program at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, N.Y., it's the aggregate of housewives services — not counting taking care of the children.

She cited the figure late last year at a conference sponsored by the program and dealing with "Feminist Perspectives on Housework and Child Care." The transcript of the meeting was published recently.

She said, "If the work of the housewife were to be treated as other work is, in terms of social security, pension benefits, vacations and health insurance, every institution of society would be affected."

Not only housewives were heard from at that meeting. There also were those who earn their living doing housework for other people.

Carolyn Reed of the New York Alliance of Household Technicians for instance, noted that she has worked in the housework field for 20 years. "In most professions," she added, "After 20 years, you would look forward to retirement but I can't pay my bills on what I've made."

She said at least 1.5 million people, almost all of them women

and most of them black, go to work in other people's homes under what she called "the age-old exploitative conditions" and she sees an irony in the situation, given the rising demand for household services which under ordinary forces of supply and demand, she says, should mean that the workers would be guaranteed a high wage.

"Women Today" asked the founder of the household technicians movement, Mrs. Geraldine Miller, in New York recently whether the houseworker is making progress. Yes, she said, but there's still far to go. She noted application of minimum wage regulations to paid household workers a few years ago and she says that she believes more people know about household workers and their situation. She also notes that housewives and household workers have similar problems.

Women's work

A recent study on how Americans use their time shows that about 80 per cent of all housework and child care is still done by women. Dr. John Robinson of Cleveland State University says his findings indicate that, whether women are employed outside their homes or not, they seem satisfied with doing most of the housework and child care. He found 23 per cent wanting their husbands to help more with the household chores.

Alice Kessler-Harris, a history professor at Hofstra University in New York's Long Island, has told of feeling tension at trying to combine a career and housework. She said at a conference last year sponsored by the Sarah Lawrence College Women's Studies Program that women who have not had to make the choice may not feel so tense. They housework full-time. She decided, when she was 22 and pregnant, that she would stay in graduate school — and set out to prove herself a super housewife at the same time. She also said that when, later, she was divorced and had to work, her feeling of guilt abated.

Solutions

Various solutions have been offered to the problem of housework.

They include teamwork or cooperative efforts and making motel-type housekeeping services available to apartment dwellers for a slight fee in addition to the rent.

Another is to teach each member of a family, including the children, to be self-sufficient with regard to the preparation of food, doing of laundry and so forth, and to simplify one's manner of living.

If everyone could work at a trade or profession of their liking in this life there would be very few delinquents.