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***Escaping domesticity:  
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**Abstract**

Domestic work is one cause for concern for feminist theorists and migration experts. Research indicates that women in the global north and predominately white women are solving the issue of housework and childcare through the extraction of domestic labour from the global south. The debate about who carries out domestic labour continues and the housework dilemma has not been solved. Instead, inequalities among women on a global scale operates through the extraction of care from the global south to the global north resulting in care deficits and global care chains. This article intends to examine the issue of housework while examining contemporary families, globalisation, and the upsurge in the migration of women.

**Key words**

Domestic work; Migrant labour; feminised care work; global care chains; care deficit; The Philippines.

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## **Introduction**

Domestic work has generally been an unofficial, unpaid labour despite its importance to every functioning society. Women have always been the main doers of housework, childcare and sex work worldwide. Since the revolution of women entering the workforce, women in the northern hemisphere have been extracting reproductive labour from developing countries to escape domesticity. Additionally, a globalised market, the internet and cheaper travel costs mean that people from developed economies can extract care from poorer nations including sex, companionship and surrogacy. These extractions enable the northerners' individualism or the fulfilment of their desires. The power of currencies from developed economies permits an array of markets in underdeveloped countries, which are rife with coercion and unequal transactions of labour. Migrant women from the global south often attend to the upkeep of middle and upper- class families globally. This article looks specifically at Filipina women working as domestics in Dublin, Ireland.

Global mobility has created a situation in which women from the south are servicing richer world citizens through an exchange of emotional labour (Hochschild 2012). For the first time in Irish history there are more young women than young men in employment in Ireland (Barry and Conroy, 2013), however, an absence of affordable childcare and parental leave are barriers faced by many women in Irish society (Barry and Conroy, 2013). In effect, the lack of decent and affordable childcare and the stagnation of masculinised work patterns have resulted in the extraction of care workers from the Philippines to fill the care deficit.

One of the main questions in this article is 'at what cost are Irish women escaping domesticity?' My goal is to examine the organisation of modern families and global care chains through an equality framework focusing on the fourth dimension of affective equality which is love, care and solidarity (Lynch, 2012). The data collected through interviews with Filipina domestic workers and Irish mothers currently residing in Ireland highlights these contemporary care chain issues.

## **The organisation of the modern family**

State identity is formed around the family and its values. Traditionally and historically, due to mass outmigration and the Catholic Church, Irish families were categorised as white, catholic, heterosexual and the male of the household was considered as the wage earner. However, the Irish family has altered dramatically, now encompassing many non-traditional roles. Women have made up a large part of the workforce since the 1980's and in 2014 stood at 55.9% (CSO 2014). More couples are choosing not to marry yet the birth rate is still one of the highest in Europe so my question is this: with an increase in capital and a decline of women working in the home, who looks after the children?

Historically, women were positioned as the main caregivers in Irish families. The care of middle- and upper-class children was aided by the rural working class housemaid. The care of the children of the working-class housemaid fell to her kin or female neighbours and in many cases in Ireland, to the state. Poor women were often victims of incarceration and their children were either adopted or put into industrial schools (Smith 2007). The care of children by the state has been revealed as abusive,

regimental and fundamentally religious. Maggie Feeley (2009) found that children who had been confined in industrial schools experienced a profound lack of love, care and solidarity.

According to Barry and Conroy (2013), an absence of decent childcare as well as discrimination in the workplace are barriers for women specifically. Baker and Lynch (2012) highlight the problem with the breadwinner model of care is that it cannot substitute for the kinds of primary care people need and perpetuates a division of labour within the household, defining the care giver as a dependent. Baker and Lynch (2012) have shown that this is attributable to gender inequality.

A gap between second wave feminism and third wave feminism is noted, the radical feminists of the 1970s were concerned with women being confined to the home and demanded wages for housework. Ehrenreich (2000) observes in 'Maid to Order', Friedan (1963) author of 'The Femme Mystique' even approved of hiring other women to do the household chores which were, according to Friedan "beneath the abilities of a woman of average intelligence" and, "peculiarly suited to the capacities of feeble-minded girls." (2000:87). Subsequently, the demand for women's 'wages for housework' has quietened down and been replaced with the demand for equal pay in the workplace. Although women's work has shifted from the home into the workforce, housework is still part of a woman's 'double day'. Therefore, housework and childcare has not reduced, although the time and effort allotted to them have. Consequently, a reduction in the value of housework has emerged as well as the desire to work and maintain the household in a time-efficient affordable way, resulting in the hiring of other women to do the 'dirty work'.

In the past when women were trapped in bad marriages, they were called oppressed, nowadays, as women have earned the right to vote, own property and enter a profession, they walk into an "autonomous" and "free" form of inequality. In the past, women were often confined to the home which limited their political participation and even their communication with others. Now, the home is no longer their workplace but it is a place of work. Ehrenreich (2000) poses the question in 'Maid to Order', the home or at least the affluent home, is finally becoming what radical feminists in the 1970s only imagined it was-a "workplace" for women and a tiny, though increasingly visible, part of the capitalist economy.

In light of these changes, women's attitudes have altered too, the pursuit of personal happiness and fulfilment is stronger. Having less children, working more hours and having more consumer power is attributed to this change. Since women joined the labour force their lives simulate men who have always enjoyed the carefree work system and its trend toward individualism. The adaptation to the male workforce preserves masculinised work patterns. Nowadays services in the home are paid for through work, the more money made outside the home, the more employees they can have inside it. In the midst of these changing trends and cultural shifts, my intention again is to draw attention to the care of the household. The devaluation of this labour has not meant the reduction of it but a negative reflection of women who do reproductive labour has been created. Hochschild (1989) argues that women pay an emotional price for doing the work at home as well as their own jobs, which is deemed "a devaluation of themselves or their daughters as females" (1989:273). The problem is; "that society devalues the work of the home and sees women as inferior because they do devalued work." (Hochschild, 1989:274). The majority of heteronormative

families are two-job families and very few women identify as a housewife anymore. Folbre (1994) notes that housewives were first labelled 'unoccupied' and then 'dependents' until 1920 as women's market value had disappeared from official view. The author states that "the assumption that housewives were not productive workers was exported to many countries in the developing world" (Folbre, 1994:95). It is commonly experienced by women, that recognition and acknowledgement is rewarded to their male counterparts when they do care work, while being ignored when women do the same work. Culturally, there is a tendency to reward caring behaviour in men as it is perceived as unnatural and therefore a type of training which must be acknowledged and reinforced. On the contrary, women are perceived as 'natural' caregivers so there is no need for positive reinforcement, it is assumed to be in her nature. Even in their place of work women are expected to be the minder of emotions. In her book 'The Outsourced Self', Hochschild (2012) examines white middle-class America in her study of outsourcing domestic labour. She examines an array of tasks from choosing your child's name to organising a birthday party to life altering things such as finding a significant other to surrogacy, where she observes the exchanges between surrogates and those seeking to rent a womb. Throughout the book there is a common complaint from participants that life is very busy, those researched commented that they did not have enough family time. They spend vast amounts of time outsourcing tasks to paid professionals in the pursuit of spending more quality time with their families but they end up using up that time managing the outsourcing itself. The sale and purchase of these things mean that emotional labour is at the forefront of these exchanges. The surrogate mother has to manage her emotions so she does not get too attached to the baby she grows in her womb, the sex worker has to nurture each client so they feel satisfied while keeping her emotions reigned in, the domestic worker has to mind children who spend their formative years with her, while managing her own feelings. She may long for her children in the Philippines and she may love her charges dearly but must guard her emotions so she does not evoke jealousy in her employer and risk being fired.

The emotional labour in reproductive work is devalued and feminised. The feminisation of care has downgraded care to a status not worthy of a high salary, benefits, breaks and reunification. If the transaction must take place, it would benefit the worker greatly to be rewarded for her work. However, in the capitalist economies that generate these structures, there is no value attributed to care work. In 'The Managed Heart' Hochschild (2014) explains how women are more likely to master their anger and aggression to be 'nice', whilst men are assigned the task of mastering fear and vulnerability as they are assigned aggressors against those who break various sorts of rules. Women, due to subordination, are generally more susceptible to verbal abuse than men. When men feel anger it is justified as a sign of a deep conviction, when women feel anger it is a sign of instability and not as a response to real events but as a reflection of themselves as 'emotional' women (Hochschild, 2014). Since women are considered 'emotional' when they complain or express opinions they are discredited, resulting in the assumption that emotions cloud their rationality. Domestic workers may find this in the treatment they receive in families, complaining about a child's behaviour could result in blame being transferred onto the nanny for being too sensitive or for not being 'nice' enough to the children. There is also the need to be 'nice' all the time. There is always the risk of not getting on with the family therefore the domestic worker has to be the caretaker of the family's feelings or risk losing her job. According to Hochschild (2014), women have a better grasp of emotions and not because they are emotional, like most people think, but because of their

subordinate status, emotional labour is a resource for women. Since women have not enjoyed equality in society, they have harnessed emotional labour as a source of getting things they need, a source which men have not needed to cultivate. It has been mistakenly attributed to innate female qualities but instead it has developed since childhood through the necessity to master aggression and anger so that they are nice and nurture caring traits. Unlike women, Hochschild (2014) notes that men master fear and vulnerability as they are assigned the task of aggressors. Under the next heading I examine how the advent of a female labour force has brought migration to Ireland, the majority of which is from the Philippines. I will examine the migration of Filipina women further situated in a transnational feminist framework (Yeates 2005).

### **The globalisation of care work: Filipina domestic workers**

As developed nations require reproductive labour more women are migrating to fill the need in industrialised nations causing a “care deficit” in the Philippines (Parrenas 2002). Many children grow up in transnational families where the mother migrates with the aim to send home remittances. When the husband stays behind it is often referred to as the ‘Filipino divorce’. Filipino transnational families are regularly sensationalised in the media too. Negative media attention blaming migrating mothers on the breakdown of the Filipino family vilifies transnational families. Hypocrisy is evident as the Philippines has grown increasingly dependent on their remittances. The Philippines is the biggest exporter of female labour in the world and relies on migration to sustain the economy which has incurred large debts with the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) which it may never be free of.

Parrenas (2002) argues that the vilifying of migrating mothers is tied to the moral disciplining of women. As national discourse on the care crisis in the Philippines vilifies migrant women, it also downplays the contributions these women make to the country’s economy. Such hand wringing merely offers the public an opportunity to discipline women morally and to resist reconstituting family life in a manner that reflects the country’s increasing dependence on women’s foreign remittances. The Filipino economy depends heavily on the remittances of migrant Filipino workers especially the female labour force. According to Parrenas, “some 30 to 54 percent of the Filipino population is sustained by remittances from migrant workers” (2002:39). In ‘The Force of Domesticity’, *Filipina Migrants and Globalisation*, Parrenas (2008) examines the care chain and the connection maintained between migrant women and their families, and maids in the Philippines. She found that most migrant mothers trust their eldest daughter the most with managing the house. Remittances are a key element in the intimacy between migrant mothers and family, usually it is between mother and eldest daughter, the mother is therefore involved in the co-management of the household. Women financially provide and emotionally nurture from a great distance while men are emotionally absent (Parrenas 2008). Ambivalent settlement feelings are reported as they consider the Philippines home but don’t resettle there. This may be due to a sex-segregated labour market and a huge pay gap in the Philippines.

Feeling like a part of the family is common among domestic workers and employers. In my interviews and during my research this sentiment came up repeatedly. In many ways this discourse is a way of saying that they felt the employers had treated them well, however, the coercive element (inherent) in this discourse is

important to examine. Romero (1992) points out that the family has a coercive side, as it serves to and disguise the exploitative side of the relationship. When domestic workers are told they are a like a member of the family, it can push boundaries so that workers end up doing favours, where they are not paid for doing extra work. Since domestic work is a job that goes on all day, this can mean long workdays for domestics who might be asked to babysit or help clean up after a dinner party. It is also harder for the employee to set boundaries and discuss clocked hours because they don't want to upset the family. Furthermore, the contradiction in this discourse is that only one family is prioritized and that is the employing family. The importance is bestowed on *their* birthdays, *their* activities, *their* needs. The family of the domestic worker is, on the contrary, sacrificing their care needs in the exchange of the migrating mother's reproductive labour for a wage, a wage which sustains the basic needs of the transnational family, but which drains love and care from them. They experience social decline in the host country. Domestic workers experience 'spatial deference' whereas they are segregated from the families in their workplace (Parrenas, 2008:99). According to Anderson (2000) it is not only labour but the self that is bought through the hiring of domestic workers. Anderson has stated that "For employers of carers, describing a worker as part of the family facilitates the myth that caring is untainted by the marketplace" (2000:123). She also describes how doing this allows the employers to imagine that the worker is fulfilled by her role as carer and the worker can also use this description to say their employers are the 'good' ones. However Waerness (1984) explains that what the 'part of the family' rhetoric obscures is relations in paid care are 'asymmetrical'. While the worker is expected to have familial interest in the employing family, this is not reciprocated. The care work itself requires emotion, love and relationships to be formed whether that is with an elderly relative or a child. It is intimate work, therefore the self of the person is entwined in her labour, she is not merely selling her labour but herself to the family. Anderson (2000) describes it as the commodification of the personhood. Having allegedly sold her personhood, the domestic worker is both person and non-person (Anderson, 2000). Dependence on the family to provide her immigration status is not uncommon. The risks are: being abused, sexually assaulted, enslaved or just unhappy in her work, without having the option to leave and freely seek employment elsewhere.

Legally, in Ireland, employees can work up to 48 hours a week (citizensinformation.ie). However, according to the MRCI (Migrant Rights Centre Ireland) (2015) au pairs are being paid just 100 euro a week for a forty-hour week of childminding, cooking and cleaning. Unlike nannies, au pairing is not regulated and is very vulnerable to exploitation. The MRCI (2015) report also finds that a crèche can cost 11,000 euro a year annually. According to the MRCI (2015), Ireland operates an employment permits system for workers from outside the EU, however, by 2009 the state ceased to issue work permits for childcare needs except for limited circumstances. Due to the ineligibility of work permits, the childcare deficit has been fulfilled by au pairs and undocumented migrants often in casualised work. The MRCI (2015) states that these groups are vulnerable groups who are subject to exploitation in private homes. The author of the report states that, student migration now represents the largest category of non-EEA migrants (52%) to Ireland. In 2014 there were 49,500 non-EEA students in Ireland, compared to just 28,021 in 2005 and 41,415 in 2010. Recent MRCI research also shows a high concentration of undocumented workers in the domestic work sector in Ireland (MRCI 2015)

## **Help is very hard to get unless I pay for it (Laura)**

Laura is a partner in a dual income family who needed childcare for her son. Paid care was the only solution for Laura, if she wanted to re-enter the workforce. This is attributable to the lack of community in Laura's life. Her family do not live nearby, her friends are also working mothers and Laura expressed guilt about asking for help. This individualisation is observed by Hochschild in 'The Second Shift' (1989) where mothers (a couple of decades ago) were burdened with the 'super woman syndrome'.

Oh, I wouldn't (ask for help) because I don't have any family help here I have a few sisters but they work, a couple of sisters live in Dublin but they work. I have nobody to call on, the only people I'd have to call on I'd have to pay them, so I don't have any outside support so in a pinch I could maybe ask a friend but I'd feel bad about it and most my friends do work (Laura interview).

Women in wealthy countries are expected to manage their lives in a highly individualised way and collective care and communalism is not culturally nurtured. Laura experienced isolation and boredom as a consequence of minimal adult interaction. These symptoms are reminiscent of the 1950's housewives in suburbia, many of whom suffered from depression and more mental health issues when they reached middle age and their children left home.

It's very stressful being with a young child all day long. You have no time, it's not like normal work where you have tea breaks and lunch breaks and a human interaction, I mean an adult interaction (Laura interview).

Finding affordable care is challenging for parents. Furthermore, many mothers worry that another person wouldn't do the job as well as themselves and are not comfortable the first time they leave their children with a paid carer. In addition, when the participant's experience of care was discussed, it was their mother they referred to and not their fathers. Chowdrow (1980) argues in her book 'The Reproduction of Mothering' that women have a greater desire to be mothers than men do to be fathers because they were mothered by a woman. When girls grow up, they try to recapitulate their mother while boys try to find someone 'like mother'. According to Chodrow this motivates women to be more central in their children's lives. Laura indicated that her and her husband shared a lot of the care of their son, especially now that she was working. Nevertheless, she had been the 'primary parent' for the first couple of years and was working less hours than her husband at the time of the interview.

I'm a lot happier hiring help. When I was doing it all on my own I thought nobody else could do it or could do it the way I wanted and I'm just a lot happier that I have help and I'm not... the world can get very small when you're the only one doing it and everything seems enormous, but when you have some help it just frees you up (Laura interview).

The lack of parental leave in Ireland is a barrier for families who would like to share childcare. This is closely related to the feminisation of women's work, which, in the labour force, is also often related to care.



## **Then there was no money so, you know, women with no money turn to sex to pay for things (Annie)**

A common response about outsourcing care of their children was the fear that someone else wouldn't be able to do the job as well as they could. There was a sense of fear about what was best for them and that only they as the mother knew what that was.

I wouldn't feel confident leaving them with anyone else, for trust reasons. I always felt that if anyone were to mind them it would be me or it would be my mother or a sister but beyond that no. At least I knew they were okay when they were with me (Annie interview).

There was, however, a distinction in the independence experienced by Laura and Annie. Laura conveyed a high level of support from her husband in her wish to work whereas Annie divulged her financial dependence on her husband, which she equated to 'feeling robbed'. A traditional gender ideology is apparent in Annie's marriage; gender roles are clearly defined, therefore caring and domestic work are defined as feminine responsibilities. The encouragement to work (by their husbands) and their desire to work differs greatly. Laura expresses a desire to go back to work whereas Annie says she was happy to exit 'the rat race'. On the contrary, she did express feeling 'robbed' by not being able to earn her own living.

No I felt robbed that I wasn't (working), I had to depend on my husband financially and I had no means and I had no source of income, right, so after a year, after a month I got pregnant, and then I had [name omitted] so I said, well, what I'll do is, I couldn't afford to have care or go back to work so I said the best person that could mind the babies was me (Annie interview).

Economies rely on the unpaid labour of women and they are often left carrying the load of childcare and household management without any wage or government assistance. I think for stay at home mothers, there should be, maybe up until the kid is 5 or until they start school, there should be some financial assistance whether it's a hundred euros a week or something. Some form of childminding. Austerity adversely affects women, leaving few options available to them to sustain their households independently (Folbre 1994). Lone parents have been subjected to stigma and poverty in Irish society as well as class and gender stratification, leading to higher levels of poverty and stigmatised work. Annie described her mother in law's situation as lonely and suggested that she used prostitution as a means of income. Her mother in law was a lone parent in the 1950s. She was poor, mentally ill and an 'unmarried mother'. All of the latter would have stigmatised her. She was eventually institutionalised at the age of thirty four.

She would have had a lonelier life because she had a room. It wasn't a house, it was a room, in the fifties, in the tenements and there was no male support 'cos she being a single mother so that would have led to terrible depression, you know, and stress and it probably contributed to her illness and then there was no money so, you know, women with no money turn to sex to pay for things. Sometimes they have to, to survive (Annie interview).

### **They treat me like a member of the family (May)**

All three participants working as domestic workers gave the same response when asked about their relationship with the family, except when Lisa described working in the Middle East. May described how, in the Philippines, she did not have to work as she was a landowner which meant waiting for harvest time. In Ireland, however, she said it was a necessity. She also described having maids back in the Philippines when she lived there, other women who would cook and clean for her. May experienced a reduction in social status through migration but she explained that it was a necessity.

Yes somebody washing and cooking for me, but here I do part time but it's necessity here. (May interview).

May had worked primarily with one family with a boy, since he was one day old until he was thirteen. When I asked her if her own children were jealous she said no, adding that they knew it was a job. All three participants had emphasised the young age of their charges but they did not express any sadness about leaving them; they appeared to be very practical about it and it did seem to be as May had said, it was simply a job. Furthermore, being part of the family was expressed as something said to them. They explained that 'they treat me like part of the family' but not one of them said that they are part of their family. On the contrary, all three participants described May's apartment as their base, their home and how it emulated the Philippines as they had their Filipino family there. I wondered if May had catered and attended Tom's birthday parties in the past and if her employers attended hers'. If not, it would reflect the asymmetrical relationship that, Anderson (2000) argues, exists between domestic workers and their employers. It is the employing class that enjoy the illusion that their nanny is part of their family; it shields them from the reality that their nanny's actual family is sacrificing their own care needs.

### **For seven years still the same salary (Lisa)**

Lisa had worked in several other receiving countries and was the oldest among the participants. She had worked in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Malaysia and lastly Ireland. Her experiences differ greatly among countries. She described her life in Saudi Arabia as very restricted, her employers did not speak English and her charge wanted her to go to school with her every day.

Then I just minded that girl, only one girl but she asked me every time when she went to school she didn't want to be left alone. I must be behind her all the time, even in school I was sitting with her. The teacher didn't want, she said 'Your nanny is not going to stay with you', she (the teacher) said no. (Lisa interview).

In the Middle East she did not receive a good salary and only got two hours off per week in Saudi Arabia. She made 150 dollars a month there. Eventually she returned home and applied to Malaysia where she worked for seven years. However, her employer there did not increase her salary over the entire seven years so Lisa returned to the Philippines again and applied to Ireland. She described how she could not say goodbye or keep in touch with her charge because she had to leave quietly.

No, (I didn't keep in touch) because I didn't ask them that I was coming here because I apply to go to Ireland quietly, I didn't say anything (Lisa interview).

Lisa was the only participant who sent home remittances, her children were never reunified with her abroad and she still sends remittances for her grandchild. She reiterated throughout our conversation that she has always worked for her family. She told me that she never married and the father of her children was absent from their lives; her mother took care of the children while she worked abroad.

No we were separated, I didn't marry my husband but now he is dead also. He didn't help. I did everything for my children until now for my grandchild. My goodness, my grandchild they are in private school.

Lisa started minding children at age eight when her aunty asked her to mind a one month old baby. She continued to look after the child until he was seven years old. Lisa has spent a substantial part of her life taking care of children in different parts of the world. She managed to send enough money home so that her children could be educated privately. Resonating throughout the conversations was the ambition for their children to be well-educated.

### **I'm supposed to have three children...but my eldest passed away...because he had a broken heart (Mayja)**

Mayja's fifteen year old son committed suicide in 2009 while she was in Ireland. She describes this as very hard and how, after it happened, she was compelled to bring her children to Ireland, which she did successfully in 2010.

Very hard for me before. we travelled, I booked my ticket for this day and we fly the other day so very hard for me, that's why I planned to get my two children so 2010 I brought my two children to stay here.

According to Parrenas (2008) migrating mothers suffer an injustice as they are employed to care for rich families in the north while being denied the right to nurture their own families. According to Kakammpi (2004 as cited in Parrenas 2008) there are approximately nine million children growing up physically apart from a migrating father, mother or both parents in the Philippines. Mayja endured one of the worst scenarios imaginable for a transnational family: dealing with the death of a child long distance. The emotional cost of migration on migrant mothers is rarely measured and the care needs of the children of migrating families is often overlooked.

### **Conclusion**

As May, Lisa and Mayja work hard to realise the dream of a better life for their children, will our current form of globalisation provide opportunities for them? Will they be able to live out their lives to the best of their ability and how will they be effected by the continued care drain of Filipina women migrating to care for the children of the rich and privileged?

Globally it is women who are subjected to low wages and limited political and social participation. It is women who are denied abortion yet responsible for the care of children, it is women who are denied the freedom of sexual expression yet service the sexual needs of men and it is women who are vilified for migrating yet responsible for sustaining their nation's economies. To change the structure of current global systems, governments would need to go beyond a rights-based approach and a rescue ideology (Parrenas 2008).

Domestic workers do not need to be rescued; they are migrating in search of better pay and ways to enhance their capital in a world that values material and spending power. Most definitely, migrating women need rights, which, are an aspect in combatting coercion but furthermore, they need choices. At present, domestic workers can choose to migrate but it is a choice made under mitigating circumstances. If the Philippines were economically stable and women were empowered to earn a decent living wage, would Filipina domestic workers travel thousands of miles overseas to take up work which many consider demeaning? Low wages and inflation is a mitigating factor for many migrants from poorer countries. Continued subordination in world markets render developing countries powerless in providing welfare and equality in their local economies. In addition, care is still an ongoing crisis and with no indication that women have any intention of leaving the workforce, the question posed at the start of this article remains: who will look after the children?

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