

EVALUATION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS FOUND DIFFICULT

BY OLDER HOMEMAKERS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Importance of the Problem

The American society has raised its consumption of goods and services to a level which has never been surpassed in its history. Great strides have been made in all fields of science. Problems of physical health have been solved in many areas, with the result that life has been prolonged for a great number of people. Out of this situation, emerges the question as to the role of the older person in this society.

The number of older people has been increasing rapidly. In 1960 there were more than 16 million persons 65 years and over, an increase of 35 per cent over the number in 1950. (36, 28-29) Stated another way, 9.2 per cent of the total population of the United States belonged to this group in 1960. Moreover, in 12 per cent of all husband-wife families, the head was age 65 and over. (36, 39)

During the past few decades the mode of living for the elderly has undergone great changes, as recognized by several writers, among them Havighurst (16) and Nimkoff (27). Formerly, in turn, each generation felt it a duty to look after its aged. If they were able, the older folks remained in their own home with servants or relatives to care for them. Or they went to live with a married son or daughter, sharing in the activities of the household by contributing experience



and skills. They received care when needed, but their freedom to pursue their own interests or desires was often sharply curtailed.

These writers further point out that today there are varying opinions about the duties of children in the care of aged parents and relatives. The older people often cannot be accommodated due to the compactness and size of present-day homes, and more often than not, the aged have a tendency to feel that their services are no longer needed. Then, too, there is the desire on the part of the older generation to maintain its own identity and housing rather than sit beside the hearth of others. Old age is not a disease, nor is it a state of ill health. There is often among older people a fierce determination to be recognized as valuable members of the community. All of this adds up to the fact that as long as possible the older members of society want to lead normal lives as far as it is practicable.

During recent years, increasing numbers of older people have received the benefits of retirement housing, pensions, social security, and provisions of recreation facilities. Federal legislation has been introduced regarding medical care for the aged. However, only inadequate approaches have been made to date to meet the needs of older people in their desire to live in their own households, as evidenced in excerpts from the following letters:

Esther C. Stamats (43), Director of Services for the Aged,  
New York City: "---I do not know any studies that deal with the  
evaluation of household tasks found difficult to older homemakers."

Nathalie D. Preston (42), Supervisor Homemaker Service and Home  
Economist, Brooklyn:

Several supervisors and directors of Homemaker Services geared to the aged group were contacted, since I thought possibly their having placed homemakers in such situations, they might have data around which tasks the clients were least able to perform for themselves, requiring another's assistance in part or totally.

The New York City Department of Welfare has given service to the aged group for many years, but I was informed they have never done a study around the tasks performed for the clients. None of the other agencies have, either. However, we agreed, in discussing it, that in most instances, each client's need for help is based upon medical as well as social evaluation, and is individualized in the interest of best serving the client's needs. . . .

The material you plan to present will be invaluable to those of us who are interested in rehabilitation and the expanding programs for the aged group as well. I hope my suggestions may prove useful and wish you every success in your efforts.

This study was made to determine whether or not the performance of household tasks becomes difficult as one grows older and which types of activity cause the difficulties.

### Objectives of the Study

As people grow older, it becomes increasingly more difficult for them to pursue their daily routines, among other factors, due to lessened physical and mental powers. (32) In order to help the older woman to maintain her status as an independent homemaker and useful person as long as possible, it would be desirable (a) to identify those household tasks that cause the greatest difficulty, and (b) to make suggestions for improving the mechanics and/or management of their housekeeping.

The present study is an attempt to learn which household tasks become more difficult as people grow older, and those aspects of

housekeeping activities which cause the greatest problems.

Recommendations can then be made to point out ways by which older homemakers may make adjustments and accommodations in order to prolong their independence.

Although psychological factors enter into attitudes toward performing household tasks, the influence of these factors was not investigated in this study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature was reviewed in the fields of rehabilitation, aging, and home management. Studies directly related to household tasks found difficult by older homemakers have not been reported. Literature pertaining to the aged and the problems of the aging has been primarily concerned with the physical-medical-biological aspects or with the sociological aspects of aging. Also, a considerable application of home management principles can be made in relation to households of the aged.

In The Older Patient, Johnson (20) observed that the increase in age is a higher average age rather than a prolongation of the individual life span. He feels that this maximum age will probably remain at 90 for the next hundred years. Pointing out this increase in age, Johnson (20, 5) states that life expectancy at birth has almost doubled from 39.4 years in 1850 to 68.4 years in 1950, while life expectancy at 60 years of age has increased by only 1 year during the same period: 16.3 years in 1850 and 17.3 years in 1950. The 4 components of the aging process are changes in: (1) metabolism, which may cause changes in nutritional needs; (2) mobility (muscular power and coordination); (3) reproductive power; and (4) mental and spiritual capacities. As individuals grow older beyond the third and fourth decades of life,

these factors decline, but with considerable allowance for individual differences.

In Johnson's opinion, older persons fall into three groups with respect to their attitude toward aging: (1) resentful and apt to be immature; (2) resigned, making no effort to keep abreast, using age as an excuse, and accepting financial support as a debt owed them; or (3) realistically considering aging as a natural phenomenon and learning that old age has its compensations.

Andrew (20), author of the chapter, "Anatomic Changes with Age" in the same book, discusses changes which take place in the structure of the human body, including decrease in strength and accuracy of muscular action; changes in the density of bones; calcification of cartilage; poorer tactile perception; possible development of cataracts; and possible loss of equilibrium.

Phillips (20), another collaborator, looks at the social problem of aging in his chapter, "Sociologic Aspects of Aging." He believes that a person is sociologically old when he is so regarded and treated by members of his society. The role of the aged is no longer that of preliterate society, where they were highly respected for their knowledge and experience, and as heads of families. Societal reward is associated with the function performed by the individual. Phillips presents the need for a social climate that recognizes the value of functions performed by the aged and that accepts them as first-class citizens.

Although segregated communities for the aged may provide best housing, medical and recreational facilities, the isolation from the

functions normal to a mixed community may prove deleterious, in Phillips' opinion.

Rusk (32), in Rehabilitation Medicine, points out that the elderly person is not ill, but that physical fitness is impaired. Prevention of disability through proper diet, adequate safety, freedom from excessive physical and emotional strain, adequate income, satisfying recreation, and social relationships, is essential for ensuing health in later years. A certain degree of biological regression is an inevitable consort of advancing years. Efforts directed at rejuvenation have always failed and should not be encouraged. What elderly people need is a mode of life which will allow them to prevent, or at least to postpone, the occurrence of disabling chronic diseases.

Rusk and associates (33) stated in A Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker that aging is a physical rather than a chronological phenomenon in which (1) physical agility and reactions gradually slow down as an individual grows older; (2) the ability to adjust quickly to new situations and new ideas and new work patterns is retarded in many older people; and (3) the natural processes of aging are frequently further complicated by chronic diseases of more or less serious nature.

The Federal Government has become extensively engaged and heavily involved in direct and indirect services to older people, and the President of the United States called for a White House Conference on Aging to be held January 9-12, 1961. A number of background papers were prepared by selected committees. The volume on housing (25) discusses: housing needs; the housing supply; current efforts made affecting the housing supply, such as community support and public

projects; and the emerging patterns of housing trends. The volume on family life, relationships, and friends (24), concentrated on aging from the viewpoint of the sociologist.

As a result of the White House Conference on Aging, a series of 14 pamphlets, Reports and Guidelines from the White House Conference on Aging, was published by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (38). Each deals with one of the specific subject-matter sections covered by the conference. These reports clarify some of the considerations of how, why, when, what, and where, that arise from the White House Conference on Aging Policy Statements and Recommendations. Volume No. 11, Rehabilitation and Aging, for example, deals primarily with vocational rehabilitation, but pays only slight attention to the area of "rehabilitation for independent living".

A second series of reports from the White House Conference on Aging (37) consists of case studies of public projects for the aged.

Arthur (3), in her book How to Help Older People, mentions that older people value their own homes first, and privacy at all cost wherever they live. She believes that the break-up of their homes symbolizes to many older persons the break-up of their personalities and their importance, and that of primary importance to practically every person over 70 is the desire to live so that he will not have to adjust to new surroundings, new people, and new ways. She lists features that will make a home safe for older people: non-slip floors, square bathtub with grab-bars; no thresholds; electric range; shelves and cabinets easy to reach; windows easy to open; and southern exposure for more cheerfulness and daylight.

Tibbits and Donahue (35), in Aging in Today's Society, address themselves to the middle-aged, and discuss the subject on a broad basis, regarding the problems to be faced in the future inasmuch as the average life expectancy has been extended.

The Older Person in the Home, issued by the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service (39), discusses the situation of the 3-generation family with respect to living arrangements, accident prevention, clothing, meal planning, keeping active, and availability of community aids.

Ravitz (30, 414), in an address to the American Home Economics Association, pointed out the cultural lag in American society and stated:

The very fact that the biological sciences and arts are keeping people alive longer than ever with even brighter prospects just ahead should give pause to raise the crucial question: Will life for the aged be worthwhile? Are values about age and the aging process beginning to modify so as humanely to accommodate the next generation of aged and integrate them into a meaningful and on-going social life? A serious risk exists here of adding immeasurably to human misery if all man can do is postpone the point of physical death while doing nothing to make human life, at whatever age, more creative and significant.

In 1959, Alameda County, California, recognized the need for evaluating the problems of the aged. A committee was set up to investigate means of helping the aged living in the county. One of its reports, Better Housing for Old People (9), gives some of the criteria to be applied: safety, convenience, and comfort. Another report (10) deals with the need for homemaker service, the purpose of which is the supervised placement of a woman, trained in homemaking skills and capable of working with others, in a home where one or more elderly



persons have asked for the aid, and where this type of assistance will enable the person or persons to remain in the home.

Gross and Crandall (14), in Management for Modern Families, state that the period of retirement requires the greatest adjustment of families, such as in the use of time and in manner of living. In addition, the aged are confronted with the specific problems of providing an income and adequately caring for needs in housing. The transition period is often difficult. The need for space is reduced, and also less energy is available to care for a large house. Housing arrangements should be adequate to care for illnesses, which are more prevalent during the later years of life. Prevention of home accidents should be of prime importance. At the beginning of retirement, the amount of energy required in caring for the house may be adequate. However, with passing years, the supply of energy will become more limited, and housing should not make unreasonable demands upon this limited supply. Work arrangements and heights of work surfaces, for example, might be changed to provide more effective working conditions. There is evidence that best personal adjustment in old age is related to the ability to live in one's own home as long as possible.

In the area of home management, attention has been given to applying methods of work simplification, conservation of energy, and effective use of storage, in the home. The older homemaker could well profit from research in this field.

Nickell and Dorsey (26), in Management in Family Living, bring out the fact that fatigue and tiredness are closely related to the way the homemaker uses her energy, and her mental approach to homemaking

responsibility. Activities should be planned so as not to use energy excessively. During the last family life cycle stage, energy diminishes and the main problem may be to conserve supply. The tasks that the homemaker enjoys doing are usually less fatiguing than those she dislikes. They present criteria for efficient working arrangements in the kitchen by means of the following questions:

1. Is the major equipment efficiently arranged?
2. Are work surfaces a comfortable height and width?
3. Are work chairs and stools comfortable?
4. Are the tools and equipment the most efficient that can be chosen?
5. Are small equipment and food supplies stored near the place they are to be used and within easy reach?
6. Are work surfaces well lighted?

The Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (34) published a brochure The Functional Home for Easier Living. This model home was designed specifically for the disabled, the elderly, and persons with cardiac handicaps. This plan incorporated principles of work simplification and safety in the home, and was intended to meet the needs of handicapped persons.

Rusk and associates (33), in A Manual for Training the Disabled Homemaker, enumerate special assistance that can be offered the older homemaker who has no special or severe physical disability:

(1) safety features of interior architecture; (2) motion-saving and special step-saving techniques; and (3) change in mode of living, and possibly even in the size of dwelling, when more active family life has

been passed.

Howard, Thye, and Tayloe (19) developed the Beltsville kitchen-workroom primarily for older or physically-handicapped farm women who need to conserve their energy. In planning this kitchen-workroom, the designers applied findings from studies of the energy expended by women in performing household tasks. They also took into account studies of the space required for various household activities. Storage designs, workspace, and arrangement of equipment were planned so that work could be done with a minimum of walking and other motions.

Kitchen Cupboards that Simplify Storage by Heiner and McCullough (18) and How to Make Cupboard Storage Devices by Cooper (7) describe the use of effective storage facilities in the light of energy conservation and work simplification.

"Functional Kitchen Storage in Terms of Body Economy" by Heiner (17) states that the most-used equipment should be placed within the normal work curve limits of the individual, with the less-frequently used above or below the normal work curve but within the maximum work curve.

Peet and Thye (26, 340) in their book Household Equipment wrote:

Saving of energy and body activity is even more of a necessity for the 10 million or more permanently handicapped homemakers in the United States--cardiac patients, accident victims, and older women of impaired vitality--many of whom must still carry on daily household duties. The need to expend energy wisely is undoubtedly as important as spending money wisely. For most people, there are limits on both energy and money available.

Zmola (41) in an article entitled "Steps to Aid Handicapped Women in Homemaking", recommends that each handicapped homemaker should answer honestly several questions, which are equally applicable to

non-handicapped older homemakers:

1. Is the job necessary?
2. If necessary, can I do it as before?
3. If necessary, and I cannot do it as before, what changes must be made?
4. Can I change method of work, or tools, or both?
5. Can I relocate tools?
6. Can I buy this service already included in my goods?
7. Can I shop by telephone?

Mundel (23), in Motion and Time Study, classifies changes that improve one's method of work into five levels. Each higher level brings about changes in motions in the level below it. Beginning with the lowest, these classes are: (1) change in body positions and motions; (2) change in tools, workplace, and equipment; (3) change in production sequence; (4) change in finished product; and (5) change in raw material.

The principles of work simplification have been applied to household tasks in publications by Fitzsimmons and Goble (11); American Heart Association (1); Gilbreth, Thomas, and Clymer (12); Hagman and Stallard (15); Pretzer and Sanderson (31); and Weaver and Walters (40).

Knowles (21) reported in Posture and Other Physiological Responses of the Work in Relation to the Height of Working Surfaces Used in Household Ironing, an analysis of the posture, metabolic rate, heart rate, blood pressure, and pulmonary ventilation of four subjects while ironing at standard 31 inch table heights and at preferred table heights during a series of tests. All subjects responded similarly in that these body processes were more highly accelerated when ironing at low conventional

height than at their preferred heights. The range in increase for the 4 subjects was: postural bend 5 to 77 per cent; force exerted 2.4 to 48 per cent; caloric requirement 14 to 32 per cent; heart rate 28 to 30 per cent; pulmonary ventilation 10 to 15 per cent; and pulse pressure 2 to 20.7 per cent above those when ironing at preferred table heights.

McCracken and Richardson (22) as reported in "Human Energy Expenditures as Criteria for the Design of Household-Storage Facilities," used homemakers of average height as subjects and made measurements of the comparative energy expenditures for storing utensils on open shelves and in base cabinets. One part of the study covered an investigation of energy expended for storing a fry pan in 4 different locations. Hanging it on the perforated hardboard required the least expenditure of energy, and placing it on a sliding shelf behind a base-cabinet door required the greatest expenditure. Storage in two other locations called for intermediate energy expenditures which were not significantly different from each other.

Bratton (6, 714) and (4) has made several studies in the area of energy expenditure in the home. In "Some Factors of Cost to the Body in Standing or Sitting to Work Under Different Postural Conditions," she stated in the conclusion:

The special fatigue that comes from being on the feet is not likely to be due to the excess energy cost over that for sitting. Equipment for sitting to work should take into account the comfort of the arms in reaching and performing the task and should provide for maximum mobility of the body with a minimum of trunk twist.

Another study by Bratton (5) dealt with the oxygen consumed in household tasks. Activities such as food preparation, washing dishes, and others similar in nature were selected to determine the relative

energy expenditure required for their performance. It was concluded that the importance of energy cost of activities does not imply that the use of energy is detrimental to the body. However, low energy cost is a desirable aim in planning equipment and methods of work if not gained at the expense of, for example, muscle strain, postural restriction, poor body alignment, or psychological preferences.

### CHAPTER III

#### PROCEDURE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

##### Method of Procedure

Eighty-five homemakers, actively engaged in homemaking, 60 years of age or older, and with no special or severe physical disabilities, were interviewed in their homes by the writer. They lived in 5 counties of Arizona; in Metropolitan Tucson; in retirement communities; in small urban and rural communities; in mining towns; and 7 lived on ranches. The socio-economic level of the families was not considered in the selection of the sample; nor was ownership of specific equipment a prerequisite for participation. The aim of the study was to examine which household tasks were difficult.

A questionnaire was developed to obtain information about activities in the following areas: food management--shopping, meal preparation, and serving; house maintenance--daily tidying, weekly cleaning, bed making, window washing, and big cleaning; laundry--washing, carrying basket, hanging up and taking down, and ironing; and personal care--bath, shampooing hair, and care of clothing. Questions were formulated concerning the frequency of performing the selected tasks and by whom they were performed; the reasons for difficulty; and personal information including the marital status and the age of the homemaker, the number of persons living in the household, tenancy, and any services

provided by the owner of rented dwellings. Observations and remarks by the homemakers were also recorded. The questionnaire was tested in 5 interviews.

### The Sample

#### Health Characteristics

These homemakers were experiencing the physical limitations commonly associated with advancing years, but none were presently suffering any serious illnesses, or physical handicaps. Within the group, however, was one arrested TB case; several had slight cases of arthritis, which had not yet progressed to a crippling stage; some had to watch their blood pressure; and one had had a heart attack in 1951.

#### Age

The ages of these homemakers ranged from 60 to 89 years. The interviewer found the oldest to be active and alert quite beyond public expectations. Of the 85 homemakers, 22 were between 60 and 64 years (26 per cent); 27 were from 65 to 69 years (32 per cent); 18 were from 70 to 74 years (21 per cent); and 18 were 75 years of age or older (21 per cent).

#### Marital Status and Living Arrangements

Of this group, 6 women, or 7 per cent, had never been married; 45, or 53 per cent, were married; and 34, or 40 per cent, were widows.

All of the married women were living in households composed of themselves and their husbands, Table 1. Three-tenths of the widowed



TABLE 1

## MARITAL STATUS AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Living Arrangements	Single		Married		Widowed	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Alone	4	67	--		24	71
With Husband	-	--	45	100	--	--
With Children	-	--	--		7	20
With Others	2	33	--		3	9
All Homemakers	6	100	45	100	34	100

homemakers were residing with their children or other individuals.

One-third of all of the homemakers were living alone; 27 per cent of those under 70 years of age, and 42 per cent of those 70 years and older were living alone, Table 2. The age of the homemaker, however, was not significantly related to her living arrangements.<sup>1</sup>

Nine out of ten of the homemakers were living in owned houses; the others were residing in rented houses or rented apartments, Table 3.

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<sup>1</sup>The level of significance was measured by the Chi Square Test, and the degree of association was measured by the Corrected Coefficient of Contingency.

TABLE 2

## AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Age of Homemaker (years)	Number of Homemakers	Living Arrangements*			
		<u>Living Alone</u>		<u>Living with Others</u>	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
60 to 64	22	5	23	17	77
65 to 69	27	8	29	19	71
70 to 74	18	8	44	10	56
75 and over	18	7	39	11	61
All Homemakers	85	28	33	57	67

\*Differences not significant

TABLE 3

## AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND TYPE OF HOUSING

Age of Home- maker (years)	Number of Home- makers	Own House		Rented House		Rented Apartment	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
60 to 64	22	20	90	2	10	-	--
65 to 69	27	26	96	1	4	-	--
70 to 74	18	16	89	-	--	2	11
75 & over	18	14	77	3	17	1	6
All Homemakers	85	76	89	6	7	3	4

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Assistance from Family Members and Others

Among families of all ages and types, varying degrees of cooperation in household tasks may be observed. Four-fifths of these homemakers reported some degree and form of assistance with homemaking tasks either from family members, neighbors, or from hired help, Table 4. A somewhat larger proportion of the homemakers who were 70 years of age or over, received help with household tasks. These differences, however, were not significant.

#### Activities Found Difficult by Homemakers

Differences existed among the four age groups regarding the areas of housekeeping and the types of activities found difficult. However, as is true in any group situation, individual differences were also found within each group.

#### Food Management

The homemakers were questioned about difficulties they experienced in shopping for food and in the various aspects of meal preparation, serving, and clean-up.

They had few complaints in regard to food preparation and serving; less than 20 per cent made comments concerning these aspects, Table 5.

TABLE 4

## AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND ASSISTANCE IN HOUSEHOLD TASKS

Age of Homemaker (years)	Number of Homemakers	Assistance in tasks*			
		Yes		No	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
60 to 64	22	18	82	4	18
65 to 69	27	20	74	7	26
70 to 74	18	16	89	2	11
75 and over	18	16	89	2	11
All Homemakers	85	70	82	15	18

\*Differences not significant.

TABLE 5

**DIFFICULTIES AND ASSISTANCE WITH FOOD  
MANAGEMENT TASKS**

Food Management Task	Homemakers with difficulties		Homemakers with assistance	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Shopping	44	52	44	52
Food Preparation	--	--	1	1
Cooking	1	1	12	14
Setting table	3	4	8	9
Clearing table	--	--	11	13
Washing dishes	9	10	16	19
Drying dishes	--	--	19	22
Putting away	3	4	9	10

Only one woman reported assistance with food preparation; however, several did have help with other activities, such as washing dishes.

All of the women stated that the availability of convenience foods in abundance and the decreased size of their families had greatly reduced the time and effort spent in the kitchen. Therefore, the daily meal preparation did not present difficulties. Several women who lived alone, however, felt that planning well-balanced meals when cooking for only one person was not easy. But others in this group emphasized the fact that they did prepare complete meals for themselves. A few expressed dissatisfaction with storage arrangements in their kitchens which caused excessive reaching and stooping. However, none of these women had attempted to improve kitchen storage.

Shopping for groceries was the major cause of difficulty within the food management area; half of the homemakers had shopping difficulties and all the homemakers that had difficulties with this task also had assistance.

Although on the average one-fifth of the women had difficulties with meal preparation and serving, the proportion mentioning such difficulties was considerably higher after age 65, Table 6. Only 5 per cent of those 60 to 64 years, in contrast to 30 per cent of those 65 to 69 years of age, reported difficulty in food preparation and serving; and 17 per cent of those 75 years and older found these activities difficult.

With respect to shopping, this task was difficult for 54 per cent of those 60 to 64 years; for 44 per cent between 65 and 74 years; but for 67 per cent of those aged 75 years or older.



TABLE 6

AGE OF HOMEMAKERS AND PERCENTAGE REPORTING  
DIFFICULTIES IN FOOD MANAGEMENT TASKS

Age of Homemaker (years)	Number of Homemakers	Food Management Tasks			
		Shopping		Meal preparation and serving	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
60 to 64	22	12	54	1	5
65 to 69	27	12	44	8	30
70 to 74	18	8	44	4	22
75 and over	18	12	67	3	17
All Homemakers	85	44	52	16	19

It appears, then, that grocery shopping presents few difficulties so long as the homemaker, at any age, is able to perform this task by herself. When, however, she must rely on others--husbands, neighbors, children or friends--to accompany her or to do all of her food shopping, this task is difficult.

Even among those who shopped alone and did not have difficulties, there was concern for the future in this respect. All of the homemakers expressed anxiety about shopping when they either cannot go themselves, or when existing arrangements for shopping are no longer available.

Ninety per cent of those homemakers who shopped alone drove their own automobiles, Table 7. Few lived within walking distance of stores or had convenient means of public transportation. Only one reported regular use of telephone and delivery service; three women used it occasionally.

#### House Maintenance

All of the homemakers lived in one-story homes without basements or attics, a common type of house structure in Arizona. However, a few houses had outside steps due to topography of the lots. About three-fifths of these homes appeared to the interviewer to be under 15 years old.

The house maintenance tasks causing the most difficulties were window washing, for 79 per cent, and big cleaning, for 69 per cent; while only 34 per cent of the women complained about weekly cleaning, Table 8. A large proportion of the women received assistance with these tasks; 59 per cent with big cleaning, 50 per cent with window washing, but only

TABLE 7

## MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION WHEN SHOPPING ALONE

Transportation	Number	Per cent
Drives car	37	90
Walk or bus	3	7
Telephone and delivery	1	3
All Homemakers	41	100

TABLE 8

## DIFFICULTIES AND ASSISTANCE IN HOUSE MAINTENANCE TASKS

House Maintenance Tasks	Homemakers with Difficulties		Homemakers with Assistance	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Daily tidying	1	1	2	2
Weekly cleaning	29	34	25	29
Bed-making	15	18	11	13
Window washing	67	79	42	50
Big cleaning	59	69	50	59

29 per cent with the weekly cleaning. While 18 per cent had difficulties with bed making, and one person complained about daily tidying, only 13 per cent had help with bed making, and 2 per cent with the daily tidying.

The weekly cleaning is accomplished by 71 per cent of the homemakers without help. In Arizona, dust is the biggest obstacle in keeping a house clean. Many of the homes had easy-care floors, and all but one of the women used a vacuum cleaner. This one homemaker 82 years old, owned one, but she likewise refused to use the automatic washer her children bought for her. Six women complained about becoming tired when running a vacuum cleaner; all of them used tank-type cleaners.

Stooping and reaching were given as causes for complaints with bed-making. Being able to walk around the bed eliminated reaching. One 68-year-old homemaker commented that turning the mattress of a double bed alone now had become too difficult and she needed her husband's assistance.

Washing windows was not considered difficult if windows were close to the ground. Fifty per cent accomplished this task without assistance. The others registered complaints such as getting dizzy, too much reaching and stooping, or that the task had just become too tiring for them.

Seasonal housecleaning, or "big cleaning", may be described as a task that combines the activities of weekly cleaning with more thorough washing of windows and walls. It often requires great expenditures of energy. Therefore, it was not surprising to find a great number of complaints indicating general tiring, too much reaching or stooping, or "just too much". Interestingly enough, however, several women who felt

that this task was too hard for them, mentioned that they had recently painted several rooms in their houses which did not tire them to a great extent. Nickell and Dorsey's statement that "tasks which one enjoys are usually less fatiguing than those which one dislikes" (26, 139) was perhaps substantiated here.

Although one-third of the homemakers reported difficulties with weekly cleaning, window washing and big cleaning were causes of difficulties for considerably more women, Table 9. Window washing was difficult for 8 out of 10 women, and big cleaning for 7 out of 10 of them.

For washing windows and big cleaning there was small difference in the percentage of women reporting difficulties between the age groups 60 to 64 years and 65 to 69 years and small difference in the percentage of women who mentioned difficulties between 70 to 74 years of age and 75 years and older. Therefore, the difference appears to be between those women under 70 years of age and those 70 years and over. Ninety-one per cent of the women over 70 years of age had difficulties with window washing compared with 70 per cent of the women under 70 years old. For big cleaning, the percentages were 83 per cent of the women 70 years and older reporting difficulties, and 59 per cent of the women under 70 years of age.

For the weekly cleaning, however, while the percentage of women between 60 and 64 years of age who reported difficulties was similar to the percentage of women between 65 and 69 years old (36 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively), the two age groups 70 to 74 years and 75 years and older differed markedly. Fifty-six per cent of the women between

TABLE 9

AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND PERCENTAGE REPORTING DIFFICULTIES  
WITH THREE HOUSE MAINTENANCE TASKS

Age of Home- maker (years)	Number of Home- makers	House Maintenance Tasks					
		Weekly Cleaning		Window Washing		Big Cleaning	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
		P < .10	$\bar{C} = .38$	P < .10	$\bar{C} = .37$	P < .10	$\bar{C} = .37$
60 to 64	22	8	36	16	73	12	55
65 to 69	27	8	30	18	67	17	63
70 to 74	18	10	56	17	94	14	78
75 & over	18	3	17	16	89	16	89
All Homemakers	85	29	34	67	79	59	69

70 and 74 years old stated that they had difficulties with this task, but only 17 per cent of those 75 years and older mentioned difficulties with weekly cleaning.

The percentage of homemakers who had difficulties with the three house maintenance tasks was related to age at the 10 per cent level of significance but the degree of association was not large.

Not all homemakers to whom house maintenance tasks were burdensome had assistance with them. Assistance in weekly cleaning was given to 29 per cent, in window washing to 50 per cent; and in big cleaning to 59 per cent of the homemakers, Table 10.

The percentage of women who reported assistance with weekly cleaning was not related to age at a significant level, but the percentage with assistance in window washing and big cleaning was significantly related to age. The degree of this relationship, however, was small although definite.

Considerably fewer homemakers aged 65 to 69 years reported assistance with window washing and big cleaning than did those in the other age groups; 26 per cent of the former group, for example, had assistance in window washing as compared with 59 per cent, 56 per cent, and 67 per cent of the other age groups.

For big cleaning, 77 per cent, 37 per cent, 67 per cent, and 61 per cent of the women in the four age groups, respectively, had assistance with the task.

The primary reasons for difficulties in house maintenance tasks were reaching, tiring, stooping, and lifting, Table 11.



TABLE 10

AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND PERCENTAGE REPORTING ASSISTANCE  
IN THREE HOUSE MAINTENANCE TASKS

Age of Home- maker (years)	Number of Home- makers	House Maintenance Tasks					
		Weekly Cleaning		Window Washing		Big Cleaning	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
			*	$P \leq .05$	$\bar{C} = .43$	$P \leq .05$	$\bar{C} = .42$
60 to 64	22	9	40	13	59	17	77
65 to 69	27	5	19	7	26	10	37
70 to 74	18	6	33	10	56	12	67
75 & over	18	5	27	12	67	11	61
All Homemakers	85	25	29	42	50	50	59

\*Differences not significant.

TABLE 11

REASONS FOR DIFFICULTY STATED BY HOMEMAKERS WITH AND WITHOUT  
ASSISTANCE IN THREE HOUSE MAINTENANCE TASKS

Reasons for difficulty	House Maintenance Tasks					
	Weekly Cleaning		Window Washing		Big Cleaning	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
With assistance	(17)		(38)		(45)	
Reaching	6	35	28	73	23	51
Tiring	13	77	14	37	26	58
Stooping	7	41	8	21	16	36
Lifting	1	5	--	--	3	7
Without assistance	(12)		(29)		(14)	
Reaching	8	67	14	48	6	43
Tiring	11	91	14	48	9	64
Stooping	12	100	2	7	4	29
Lifting	4	33	1	3	4	29

The homemakers who had assistance with weekly cleaning stated that the activity causing the most difficulty was tiring (77 per cent), followed by stooping (41 per cent), and reaching (35 per cent). Seventy-three per cent of the women with assistance in window washing complained about reaching, 37 per cent mentioned tiring, and 21 per cent, stooping. In big cleaning, 58 per cent of the homemakers with assistance gave tiring as the reason for difficulties, 51 per cent mentioned reaching, and 36 per cent said that stooping was difficult.

Among the group that accomplished the three house maintenance tasks without assistance, in weekly cleaning, all homemakers complained about stooping, and 9 out of 10 mentioned tiring. Reaching was difficult for two-thirds of those without assistance in weekly cleaning.

Reaching and tiring were each mentioned as difficult activities by 48 per cent of those washing windows alone. Only 7 per cent considered stooping, and 3 per cent of those with help considered lifting difficult in this task.

Sixty-four per cent of those without assistance gave tiring as the major reason for difficulties with big cleaning; 43 per cent mentioned reaching; and 29 per cent felt that stooping and lifting were the causes of difficulty in doing big cleaning.

### Laundry

Eleven of these homemakers engaged the services of commercial laundries, and they are, therefore, omitted from analysis of this task.

Washing of clothes has been made easier by the development of modern laundry equipment. Ironing was the cause of difficulties for 83

per cent of the women, with carrying the basket of clothes next in importance with complaints by 54 per cent, Table 12. Hanging up clothes was difficult for 28 per cent of the women.

The number receiving assistance with these tasks, however, was much smaller than the number reporting difficulties. Only 12 per cent had help with the ironing, 31 per cent had someone to carry the clothes basket, and 22 per cent had assistance with hanging up clothes. None of the women stated difficulties and none had assistance with sorting, sprinkling, and putting away the laundry.

Two-thirds of the women who did their own laundry used automatic washers, Table 13. The greatest proportion of users of non-automatic washers was among homemakers between 65 and 69 years of age; 44 per cent of this age group were using non-automatic washers. The type of washer, however, was not related to age at a significant level.

Only 7 women had dryers, and all said they had been purchased to relieve them from carrying wet clothes and hanging them up, since these tasks had become difficult to perform.

Laundry carts were used by 9 women. Many others, however, commented that they carry wet clothes to the lines in small loads.

Eight homemakers had adjustable ironing boards and they sat to iron.

One-third of the women had some assistance with laundry tasks, Table 14. Fifty per cent of the youngest group, between 60 and 64 years of age had help. The proportion dropped to 20 per cent for the age group 65 to 69 years, but about one-third of the women over 70 years of age reported assistance with these tasks. These differences, however, were

TABLE 12

## DIFFICULTIES AND ASSISTANCE WITH LAUNDRY TASKS

Laundry Task	Homemakers With Difficulties		Homemakers With Assistance	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Wringing	4	5	3	4
Rinsing	--	--	3	4
Carrying basket	40	54	23	31
Hanging up	21	28	16	22
Taking down	13	17	7	9
Ironing	61	83	9	12

TABLE 13

## AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND LAUNDRY EQUIPMENT USED

Age of Home- maker (years)	Number of Home- makers	Washer*						Laundry Cart		Adjustable Ironing Board	
		Automatic Washer		Non- Automatic Washer		Dryer					
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
60 to 64	20	14	70	6	30	2	10	1	5	3	15
65 to 69	25	14	56	11	44	2	8	2	8	2	8
70 to 74	14	11	78	3	22	1	7	3	22	2	14
75 & over	15	10	67	5	33	2	13	3	20	1	7
All Homemakers	74	49	66	25	34	7	10	9	12	8	10

\*Differences not significant.

TABLE 14

AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND PERCENTAGE REPORTING ASSISTANCE  
IN LAUNDRY TASKS

Age of Homemaker (years)	Number of Homemakers	Homemakers With Assistance*	
		Number	Per cent
60 to 64	20	10	50
65 to 69	25	5	20
70 to 74	14	5	36
75 and over	15	4	27
All Homemakers	74	24	32

\*Differences not significant.

not significant.

Ironing was difficult in some respect to 83 per cent of the homemakers; carrying clothes to the line to 54 per cent, and hanging up and taking down laundry to 46 per cent, Table 15. Seven out of ten women 70 years and older complained about difficulties with carrying a basket of clothes, compared with 2 or 3 out of 10 for the younger groups, significant differences. Hanging up and taking down the laundry was difficult to about 40 per cent of the women in each age group under 75 years of age, and to 73 per cent for the oldest group but these differences were not significant. The percentage of women having difficulties with ironing was high in all age groups; 85 per cent of women between 60 and 64 years; 76 per cent of those from 65 to 69 years of age; 93 per cent of the group 70 to 74 years of age; and 80 per cent of homemakers 75 years and older reported ironing difficulties.

The reasons for difficulties given in connection with ironing were: standing over a period of time, lifting the iron, or general tiring. As stated previously, only 8 women had adjustable ironing boards.

### Personal Care

The homemakers were questioned about possible difficulties experienced in taking a bath, shampooing hair, and caring for clothing.

Getting into and out of the bathtub was difficult for 27 homemakers. Seven of the 27 had showers installed in their homes.

Almost one-half of the women said they had their hair done regularly at the beauty parlor. This may help to account for the



TABLE 15

AGE OF HOMEMAKER AND PERCENTAGE REPORTING DIFFICULTIES  
IN THREE LAUNDRY TASKS

Age of Home- maker (years)	Number of Home- makers	Laundry Tasks					
		Carrying Basket		Hanging Up and Taking Down*		Ironing	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
		$P < .10$	$\bar{C} = .41$				
60 to 64	20	7	35	8	40	17	85
65 to 69	25	12	21	9	36	19	76
70 to 74	14	10	71	6	43	13	93
75 and over	15	11	73	11	73	12	80
All Homemakers	74	40	54	34	46	61	83

\*Differences not significant.

relatively small number who reported difficulty with shampooing; less than a fourth had this difficulty.

Failing eyesight was the cause stated by 15 women for difficulty in care of their clothing. Eighteen, however, sewed for themselves, their families, or church groups.

#### Homemaker's Judgment of Storage

The homemakers were asked to judge their storage facilities as to whether they were adequate, fair, or poor, in relation to tasks of food management, house maintenance, and laundry. Storage for food management activities was judged adequate by 53 per cent of the homemakers; for house maintenance tasks, by 39 per cent; but for laundry tasks, by only 34 per cent, Table 16. A larger proportion of homemakers said their laundry storage was "poor" than was true of storage related to the other household tasks.

#### Work Simplification Practices of Homemakers

No comment was made by 46 of the homemakers in reply to the question, "Do you use any labor-saving devices and/or practices?"

A few women used principles of work simplification in their house work. Among these were the use of long-handled tools, such as mops and dustpans. One homemaker said she wraps a cloth around a stick to dust baseboards and moldings above doors and windows. Another woman used tongs for picking up things instead of stooping. One was a retired home economist and the others mentioned Extension homemakers' clubs as their source of training.

TABLE 16

## HOMEMAKER'S EVALUATION OF HOME STORAGE

Household Tasks	Judgment of Storage Facilities					
	Adequate		Fair		Poor	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Food Management	45	53	30	35	10	12
House Maintenance	33	39	45	53	7	8
Laundry	29	34	38	45	18	21

Several women arranged the storage in their kitchen cupboards the way they felt it was easiest for them. To avoid unnecessary reaching and stooping they kept the things they used most at a convenient level. Only one reported a work surface adjusted to her height, which was built by her husband. This couple lived in one of the retirement communities.

One husband, a retired carpenter, had done an excellent job in making storage and work areas convenient for his wife in a house that was about 30 years old. The homemaker was tall and had had to work at inconvenient work surfaces most of her life. The remodeled kitchen cabinets were adjusted to her height as also was her new sewing machine cabinet.

The oldest homemaker in the group, married 64 years, was celebrating her 90th birthday the week after the interview. She and her husband had done the most outstanding job of adapting their home to independent living. An exceptionally large freezer enabled the couple to have food on hand at all times, since they depended on neighbors to shop for them. Cleaning supplies and other household articles were kept on hand in sufficient quantities to never run short. This homemaker also used an old kitchen chair, mounted on casters, to move things around the house, such as cleaning supplies, a basket with wet clothes to be hung up, or to bring the dried clothes into the house. She sat on an adjustable stool to iron and used her "chair" to hold finished items. Then she rolled the chair into the part of the house where these items were stored. She also sat on her stool during meal preparation and had her chair beside her to hold supplies or equipment. A long-handled mop was used in cleaning and she vacuumed sitting down.

Many women very consciously purchased only clothing that needed little or no ironing. Others ironed only the necessary items, like clothing, and were satisfied with household linens folded but not ironed.

These examples serve to point out the ingenuity that is used by some older persons in adjusting their household tasks and facilities to decreasing physical energy resources.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERVIEWER'S OBSERVATIONS OF HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS

In as many homes as possible, the interviewer observed facilities for performing household tasks and methods used. From these observations, it was possible to suggest some ways in which tasks or facilities might be modified with the purpose of reducing or eliminating difficulties. Habit and lack of knowledge often were the major obstacles to alleviation of some difficulties.

The older homemaker and her family may need to make adjustments in their standards of homemaking during this period of family life. Conserving one's energy by such means as using plastic placemats instead of linen tablecloths may become more important than attempting to cling to a pattern established during an earlier stage of family life.

Many of the homemakers had never given much thought to such matters as work simplification, rearranging supplies and equipment, methods of saving energy, or the like. Some felt that any such changes would require major remodeling of their homes. None of the women seemed to be particularly concerned about increasing disabilities within the next 5 or 10 years. "Let's worry about that when we get there", was usually the answer to such questions.

At the time of her interview, a high school teacher, close to retirement, was in the process of having her kitchen and bathroom remodeled. Asked if she had thought of her "stiff knees" in planning the kitchen, she replied, "I really don't know. The carpenter showed me the plans, but I have forgotten by now what they look like." The bath was only in the beginning stage of remodeling, and it was suggested that a grab-bar be installed. This kind of situation indicated to the interviewer a need to provide help in planning work areas and in thinking more clearly of individual needs and resources as homemakers approach the years of lessened energy and physical stamina.

Each of the activities mentioned by the homemakers as difficult is discussed here in the light of principles of home management and work simplification, which furnish a basis for studying ways of eliminating or reducing the causes of difficulties.

#### Food Management

More than one-half of the women depended upon their husbands or others either to take them shopping or to do the shopping for them. Some of them did not currently drive an automobile, and others had not driven for a long time. Many of them probably could make different arrangements for shopping, should the need arise. A son or daughter could take the place of the husband, or another friend or neighbor might assist. This problem of shopping, in the interviewer's opinion, merits consideration of a public service, such as the homemaker service, assuming this responsibility for older persons who need help in this area of homemaking.

The actual meal preparation, serving, and clean-up did not create any great problems. Most of the women had formerly been used to preparing meals for a large family, and, therefore, found it not difficult to prepare meals for fewer persons. It was surprising that 53 per cent considered the arrangement and the storage facilities of their kitchens adequate, because kitchens, by and large, are not designed for individuals who must conserve energy, avoid climbing, reaching, or stooping. Even the kitchens in the two retirement communities had poorly planned layouts in the interviewer's judgment, and their storage facilities did not spare the homemaker unnecessary energy-consuming movements.

A few homemakers solicited advice from the interviewer. In most cases, however, the homemaker was not aware of such aids as (1) storing at place of first use; (2) placing pieces of equipment for related jobs as closely together as feasible; (3) prepositioning tools and supplies to be grasped for immediate use; (4) utilizing sliding shelves, step shelves, and adjustable shelves; (5) rearranging supplies and utensils most frequently used to avoid stretching or stooping; (6) using a cart on wheels or a tray to save time as well as energy; (7) selecting the most efficient equipment for a task; or (8) using a chair or stool of proper height and type.

The above suggestions do not require any major structural changes. Remodeling to some degree could improve heights of working surfaces, reduce walking, and minimize stooping and reaching.



### House Maintenance

The lack of adequate storage for cleaning equipment was observed by the interviewer in many homes. This necessitated the storage of large cleaning equipment, such as vacuum cleaners, in inconvenient places.

Many homemakers had not thought of carrying small cleaning supplies in a basket, or in the pocket of an apron, to eliminate many steps.

Long-handled mops and dustpans, and the use of vacuum cleaner attachments could also help to reduce stooping and reaching to a minimum and could make cleaning less tiring. A pail of water on a dolly, a more mobile type of vacuum cleaner, or even the oldest interviewee's idea of a chair on rollers, are useful aids.

In a number of homes, the elimination of excessive bric-a-brac and scatter rugs could reduce accident hazards and would simplify housekeeping.

Several women indicated that they had tried to do too much cleaning at one time, particularly the big cleaning. More detailed planning should be suggested to avoid excessive use of energy. Motion-saving and step-saving techniques could be learned and applied.

Washing windows presented difficulties to more homemakers than any other house maintenance task. Stretching and reaching up, the major reasons for complaints, could be avoided by the use of long-handled tools. The normal decline of physical agility and energy probably contribute to making this task burdensome. Furthermore, many homemakers indicated that they disliked this task, which was undoubtedly a contributing factor to their feeling that it was difficult.

### Laundry

Modern laundry equipment has taken much of the drudgery out of the clothes-washing task. Only one homemaker had to carry the water to her washer and empty it manually.

The location of the laundry equipment in these homes, however, leaves much to be desired, in the interviewer's opinion. Of the 69 washers, a fifth were located in such places as a wash house in the rear, outside the house such as on a porch, or in the garage. Even though such laundry arrangements may not have been the basis for complaints in the present study, as the women grow older they may find that changes will become desirable or even necessary.

The use of laundry carts or baskets on wheels was not widespread among these homemakers. For some, husbands made good wash basket carriers. The husbands often also picked the items from the basket sitting on the ground and handed them to the wife to pin up. Carrying a basket of wet clothes is hard work, but it is easily remedied by using a cart. In more serious cases of handicaps, the installation of a dryer may be the only solution. Seven homemakers had dryers installed when they could no longer carry wet clothes to the clothesline.

It was not surprising that ironing was the most difficult task mentioned. Many women were purchasing garments requiring little or no ironing, or had reduced their use of household linens which required ironing. Frequent rest periods or change of activity were suggested to those who complained about tiring. Their attention was drawn to the findings of a study by Knowles (21) which emphasizes that the height of the ironing board greatly influences the rate of fatigue and weariness.

An adjustable ironing board, as well as a proper chair, is also needed by those who wish to sit while ironing. Therefore, the purchase of an adjustable ironing board appears to be a good investment for older homemakers. Sliding the iron over the surface instead of lifting it would help to avoid pains in arm or shoulder.

### Personal Care

Only two bathrooms in these houses were provided with a grab-bar at the tub. They were recommended to those who said they had trouble getting into or out of the bathtub. Installation of bathtub seats for those planning to remodel, the use of rubber mats with suction cups, and possible installation of a shower, were also suggested.

Shampooing one's hair in the shower would avoid the necessity for bending over a wash basin. Attention was drawn to the fact that shields can be purchased which allow a person to sit in a chair and lean backwards if another person is available for giving the shampoo.

General care of clothing (aside from laundering), caused difficulties for only 15 women. Many of the others still sewed for themselves and their families. Iron-on mending tape could be used in many cases where poor eyesight is a hinderance. It was interesting to hear one woman comment that sewing made her "extremely" nervous; however, she knitted beautiful, very elegant sweaters which are sold in resort shops at high prices.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY

Government and private agencies are giving considerable attention to problems of the aged, investigating the needs of this group in such areas as housing, medical care and costs, financial security, and others. However, comparatively little attention has been given to lessening the strains of housekeeping for the older homemaker.

The purpose of this study was to obtain information from a group of older homemakers about the household tasks that become difficult as one progresses through the later years. Such information about these tasks and the reasons for difficulties can provide a sound basis for programs to improve the mechanics and/or management of housekeeping. This may assist the aged in leading a healthy and independent life as long as possible.

A questionnaire was developed for interviewing homemakers about activities in the areas of food management, house maintenance, laundry, and personal care.

Eighty-five homemakers, 60 years of age or older, actively engaged in homemaking, and with no special or severe physical disabilities, were interviewed in their homes, between May and November, 1961.

The ages of the homemakers ranged from 60 to 89 years; 26 per cent were from 60 to 64 years, 32 per cent were 65 to 69 years, 21 per

cent were 70 to 74 years, and 21 per cent were 75 years of age or over. They were experiencing the physical limitations commonly associated with advancing years, but none were presently suffering any serious illnesses or physical handicaps.

Six women had never been married, 45 lived with their husbands, and 34 were widows. All of the married women were living in households composed of themselves and their husbands, while 70 per cent of the single and widowed (combined) were living alone. Nine out of ten lived in owned houses.

Over 80 per cent of the homemakers received help with one or another of the various tasks from family members, friends, or from hired help.

The tasks that caused difficulties to most homemakers in the order of their frequency were: ironing, 83 per cent; washing windows, 79 per cent; and shopping, 52 per cent.

Food preparation and serving were relatively easy tasks for 80 per cent of the women, due to the decreased size of their families and the availability of convenience foods.

Shopping for groceries was the major cause of difficulties for half of the homemakers. All women were concerned for the future when the present shopping arrangements might be available no longer.

While one-third of the women complained about difficulties in weekly cleaning, only 29 per cent had assistance with this task.

Stooping and reaching were given as reasons for difficulties with bed-making by 18 per cent of the homemakers.

Window washing was difficult for 8 out of 10 women. Fifty per cent of all the homemakers had assistance from others with this task.

Seven out of 10 women mentioned difficulties with big cleaning. However, only 59 per cent had help.

The primary reasons for difficulties in the house maintenance tasks were reaching, tiring, stooping, and lifting. Among the women who had assistance with the three house maintenance tasks, relatively more expressed difficulty due to tiring in the weekly cleaning and in the big cleaning; but due to reaching in washing windows. On the other hand, among the homemakers who did not have assistance in these tasks, reaching, tiring, and stooping were mentioned by two-thirds, by nine-tenths, and by all, respectively, as causes of difficulty. About half of those without assistance in washing windows gave reaching and tiring as the cause of difficulty, but only a few mentioned either stooping or lifting. In big cleaning, tiring was the cause of difficulty for the largest proportion, 64 per cent, of those who had no help in this task.

One-third of the homemakers had some assistance with one or several laundry tasks. Ironing caused complaints by 83 per cent for reasons such as: general tiring, aching feet and legs from standing over a long period of time, and aching arms and shoulders from lifting the iron.

Two-thirds of the women who did their own laundry used automatic washers. Seven women purchased clothes dryers when they could no longer carry wet clothes to the lines and hang them up.

Eight homemakers had adjustable ironing boards and 9 used a laundry cart.

Fifty-four per cent of the women mentioned difficulties in connection with carrying a basket with clothes and 28 per cent with hanging up clothes.

Efficient storage arrangements are very important in the conservation of energy and in avoidance of reaching, stooping, and lifting. In the interviewer's opinion, based on observations, considerable discomfort and inconvenience was being tolerated unnecessarily. Only 10 per cent of the homemakers rated the adequacy and convenience of their storage arrangements in the food management and house maintenance areas as "poor". Twenty-one per cent, however, gave a "poor" rating to their laundry storage.

Getting in and out of the bathtub was strenuous for one-third of the women. Seven of them eliminated this problem through the installation of showers.

A small number, less than 25 per cent, had difficulties with shampooing their hair. The reason for this small number might be that almost one-half of the entire group regularly engaged the services of a beauty parlor.

Fifteen women gave failing eyesight as the cause for difficulties in the care of their clothing. However, 18 did a great amount of sewing for themselves, their families, or church groups.

A few women, sometimes with the help of their husbands, had adjusted their household tasks and facilities to decreasing physical energy resources. One had work surfaces adjusted to her height; another

had a chair on casters to transport things around her house; and others used long-handled tools for reaching tasks.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

This study was based upon the hypothesis that the performance of household tasks becomes increasingly difficult as one grows older.

To date only limited information is available on specific tasks that become difficult to perform with advancing years and the reasons for the difficulties. Therefore, the following objectives were set up for this study: (1) to find out from a group of older homemakers which household tasks caused them the greatest difficulties, and (2) to determine which activities involved in these tasks were the causes of difficulties.

Although the results of this study need to be substantiated by a larger investigation, the findings here indicate that:

1. there is a degree of relationship between age and the ability to continue performance of certain household tasks;
2. some aspects of homemaking do not cause difficulties or are self-adjusting by reason of a smaller family. These include, for example, meal preparation and serving, daily tidying of the home, and sorting, sprinkling and putting away the laundry;
3. the causes of difficulties are those activities that involve reaching, stooping, lifting, and general tiring;

4. a wide range of possibilities exists for applying the principles of body mechanics and management to these tasks; and

5. there is a need to identify difficulties and alternatives available for lessening them, and to plan a program of education and demonstration for older homemakers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

The following recommendations for further study are presented:

1. Studies similar to this investigation would be of value if conducted in other sections of the United States; with a larger number of older homemakers; living in different climates; in varying types of communities; and with differing life histories of occupation, health, and the like.
2. The psychological aspect of declining physical capabilities and its relation to the performance of household tasks is worthy of study. Determination of the relative importance of the mechanical and of the psychological reasons for difficulties would be basic to programs of helping older homemakers. In other words, is it pure muscular demand, improper use of muscles, poor equipment or work habits, monotony, psychological resistance to the task, or combinations of these, that cause difficulties in performance?
3. Determination within a given community of the type and degree of assistance available from existing agencies would provide guidelines for the establishment of additional services, or expansion of existing services, that would enable older homemakers to maintain their own households for longer periods of time.

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## A P P E N D I X

Case Number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

EVALUATION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS FOUND DIFFICULT BY OLDER HOMEMAKERS  
by Helen M. Goetz

Persons in Household	Age	Marital Status	Remarks
Homemaker			
Husband			

Own Home \_\_\_\_\_ Rent \_\_\_\_\_ House \_\_\_\_\_ Apartment \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Services provided by owner of house or apartment \_\_\_\_\_

I. FOOD MANAGEMENT:

Shopping: Done by whom? \_\_\_\_\_ How Often? \_\_\_\_\_

How accomplished? \_\_\_\_\_

Meal Preparation and Serving:

Type	Homemaker	Husband	( )	Frequency		
				R	F	O
Preparations						
Cooking						
Setting table						
Clearing table						
Washing dishes						
Drying dishes						
Putting away						

What labor-saving devices a/o practices are used? \_\_\_\_\_

Remarks: \_\_\_\_\_

II. HOUSE MAINTENANCE:

Type	Homemaker	Husband	( )	Frequency		
				R	F	O
Daily tidying						
Weekly cleaning						
Making beds						
Washing windows						
Big cleaning						

What labor-saving devices a/o practices are used? \_\_\_\_\_

Remarks: \_\_\_\_\_

## THESIS ABSTRACT

### EVALUATION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS FOUND DIFFICULT BY OLDER HOMEMAKERS

by

Helen M. Goetz

The purpose of this study was to obtain information from a group of homemakers, 60 years of age and older, about household tasks that become difficult to perform as people grow older; and to learn which aspects of housekeeping activities cause the greatest difficulties.

Eighty-five homemakers, actively engaged in homemaking, and with no special or severe physical disabilities, were interviewed in their homes about activities in the areas of food management, house maintenance, laundry, and personal care.

Eight out of ten women received help with housekeeping tasks from family members, friends, or from hired help.

The tasks that caused difficulties to most homemakers were: ironing, 83 per cent, window washing, 79 per cent, and food shopping, 52 per cent.

Ironing was difficult for reasons such as: general tiring, aching feet and legs from standing, and pains in arm and shoulder from lifting the iron.

The primary reasons for difficulties with window washing, and other house maintenance tasks were: reaching, tiring, stooping, and lifting.

Dependency on others for transportation was the primary reason for difficulties in shopping for groceries.

The proportion of women having difficulties increased with age at a significant level for carrying a basket with clothes, weekly cleaning, window washing, and big cleaning.

The data of the study point to a need for a program of education to aid the older homemaker in identifying her difficulties and making the best possible adjustments.

APPROVED:

Alida S. Hotchkiss  
Director of Thesis

May 14, 1962  
Date