

When Mommy's away . . .



Is this a man's place? "House husbands" are not uncommon in these changing times.

by Lauren Naylor

Right now, as students, your biggest concern may be the calculus test you have on Tuesday or who will win the football game this weekend.

But, in a relatively short period of time, as mothers or fathers, you may be faced with a more significant problem.

Every day throughout the United States, 5 to 12 million children between the ages of 5 and 13 are at home alone, according to an article in the *Dallas Morning News*.

They are called "latchkey kids." The article says the term was coined in the early 1800s to describe children who wore their house keys on strings around their necks.

Currently, their numbers are growing.

Dr. Finlay, assistant professor of sociology at Texas A&M, says the increase in the number of latchkey kids is the result of a changing economy.

"Latchkey kid" doesn't automatically mean divorce anymore," she says. "In fact, since about the mid-60s there has been a big increase in women going to work.

"And, somewhere in the early 80s it passed 50 percent of married women in the work force.

"It's just economic change. We've had a lot of inflation, and wages haven't kept up with that. So, for the average family now to own a house and to own cars and to live the lifestyle they want to live, they have to have two incomes instead of just one."

Finlay says another reason for the increase is that more young women want to use the degree they worked for in college.

"A lot of young women are wanting to work," she says. "They see that as part of their life, having a job and a career as well as a family.

"So, for most people, it's not a choice of career vs. family anymore. They want to combine both."

But one question that has been bothering psychologists and sociologists for years is this: Can a child be brought up properly as a latchkey kid?

"A lot of studies have tried to compare children of working mothers and children of non-working mothers," Finlay says. "Some of the earlier ones showed problems in children of working mothers.

"However, most of these studies didn't really compare equivalent groups. Working mothers used to be primarily from poor families or one-parent families.

"So you were comparing kids from families, where there really wasn't enough to go around, with middle class families where the mothers weren't working.

"When you compare equivalent levels of society, there's really not that much difference in the outcome of the