



Talking point



Who is washing the dishes tonight? The gender gap in household work: causes and effects

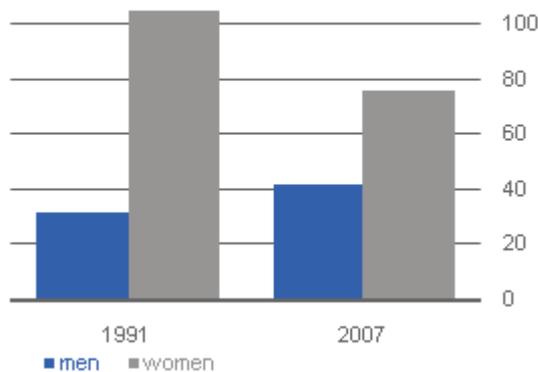
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While gender gaps in the workplace continue to receive (much needed) attention, the situation in unpaid household work is rarely talked about. Recent data confirm that German women still do the lion's share of family work, even when they have a job.

Women in full-time paid employment still spend nearly twice as much time on housework on an average work day as their male counterparts. When women live with a partner, their household work load increases significantly whereas men's decreases. The presence of children widens the gap further. German mothers in full-time employment spend (on average per week day) 1.5 hours more on paid and unpaid work combined than fathers in full-time employment. Although female labour force participation is increasing substantially, family work at large continues to be allocated disproportionately to women within a couple.

Gender gap in housework: slowly reducing

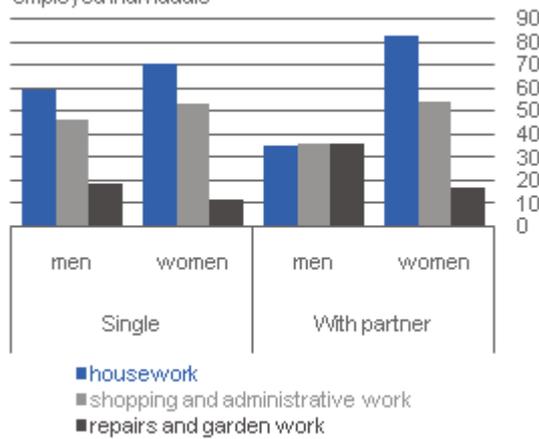
Minutes of housework, per week day, for full-time employed individuals



Source: Socioeconomic Panel 1991-2007; Computations from DIW Berlin

Men need looking after!

Minutes of household work, per week day, for full-time employed individuals



Source: Socioeconomic Panel 1991-2007; Computations from DIW Berlin

The impact: both social and economic

This issue is significant from an equality but also from an economic perspective: as everybody's day has 24 hours, there is an obvious relationship between women's paid work and unpaid family work. A higher share of unpaid family work explains women's preference for part-time paid work. Regardless of paid work intensity, it also reduces their chances of professional success. A higher double load of housework and paid work limits career opportunities: due to higher family responsibilities (occupying mental space), limited mobility, and the difficulty to handle extra work hours when required.

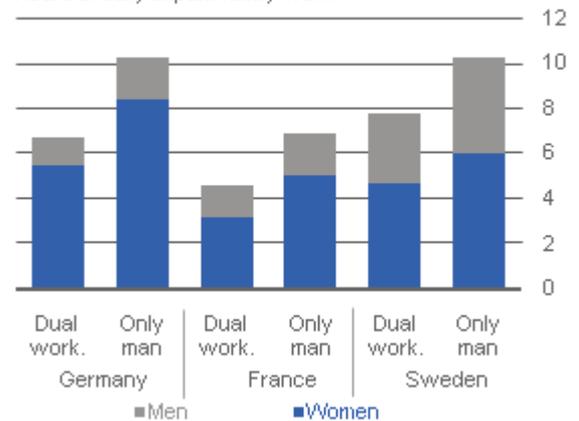
A more encompassing outlook: family-work systems



The concept of family-work systems includes the idea that, within households, there is demand not only for income, but also for unpaid family work, and that they cannot be considered in isolation. This concept was developed in the 1970s to encompass all activities, performed for free for the family by a family member, which are necessary for the family to function adequately. It includes housework, shopping, administrative work (dealing with utility services, banks, health services, schools, etc) and caring work (children, the elderly, or sick people). Women worldwide spend more time on daily family work than men. But the extent of the gender difference is particularly high in Germany. Other data also show that when both paid and unpaid work are taken into consideration, women in part-time employment work longer hours overall than do men who work full-time.

### Women work more at home worldwide, especially in Germany!

Hours of daily unpaid family work



Source: European Quality of Life Survey for 2003

### Factors influencing gender equality in the distribution of family work

A recent study carried out by the BiB (Federal Institute for Population Research) identifies three main factors affecting the gender gap in unpaid family work:

- Women's working status. Men's involvement in family work tends to increase with their partner's participation in paid employment, especially when they have at least one child. This is likely to benefit all family members, especially through more intense father-child interactions.
- Women's income. The more the woman contributes to household income, the more she can rely on her partner's help at home. This provides another incentive - and another way - to narrow the gender wage gap. Enhancing higher education for girls, including in Science and Engineering, will also help: the less education women have, the less likely they are to have paid work.
- Expectations about gender roles. Couples with less gender bias in their outlook tend to have more equal shares of family work than traditional couples. This partially explains the regional differences (on top of the availability of childcare): men in east Germany tend to do more family work than their western counterparts.

### What can be done?

As usual, both governments and companies have a role to play, as well as individuals.

- Any incentive for fathers to spend more time on family work without a major downside, financially and career-wise, will help. The increase in paid parental leave for fathers should have a positive effect.
- More and better part-time career opportunities for both genders can also go a long way, in connection with good-quality, affordable childcare with flexible hours.
- A decrease in the gender wage gap would make it more viable financially to share more equitably both unpaid and paid work.

See also:

[More mothers at work, mostly part-time: What is the problem, exactly?](#)

[Women on expedition to 2020: The path to more gender equity in Germany](#)

[Are women really worth less?](#)

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