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*Research Article*

### **Equality at home – A question of career? Housework, norms, and policies in a European comparative perspective**

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## Contents

1	Introduction	1412
2	Theoretical approaches to the division of housework	1413
2.1	Economic explanations	1413
2.2	Gender explanations	1415
3	Cross-national differences in the division of housework	1415
4	Work–family policies and gender norms in different welfare states	1416
5	Hypotheses	1418
5.1	Individual-level hypotheses	1418
5.2	Country-level hypothesis	1420
6	Data and methods	1420
7	Results	1422
8	Summary and conclusions	1430
9	Acknowledgements	1433
	References	1434

# **Equality at home – A question of career? Housework, norms, and policies in a European comparative perspective**

**Susanne Fahlén<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

### **BACKGROUND**

Dual-earner families are widespread in contemporary Europe, yet the division of housework is highly gendered, with women still bearing the lion's share. However, women in dual-career couples and in other types of non-traditional couples, across and within different European countries, appear to handle the division of housework differently.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this study is to examine the division of housework among various couple-earner types, by determining i) whether relative resources, time spent on paid work, gender attitudes, and family structure reduce variations in housework between different couple types, and ii) whether the division of housework varies between countries with different work–family policies and gender norms.

### **METHODS**

The study uses data from ten countries, representing different welfare regime types, extracted from the European Social Survey (2010/11), and employs multivariate regressions and aggregated analysis of the association between the division of housework and the contextual indices.

### **RESULTS**

The results show that dual-career couples divide housework more equally than dual-earner couples, relating more to the fact that the former group of women do less housework in general, rather than that men are doing more. The cross-national analysis shows tangible differences between dual-earner and dual-career couples; however, the difference is less marked with respect to the division of housework in countries with more institutional support for work–family reconciliation and less traditional gender norms.

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## **CONTRIBUTION**

By combining conventional economic and gender-based approaches with an institutional framework, this study contributes to the research field by showing that the division of housework within different couple-earner types is contextually embedded.

## **1. Introduction**

Dual-earner families are widespread in contemporary Europe as a result of women's increased labour force participation, entailing a major challenge for many couples with respect to achieving a work–life balance, as the division of labour becomes a major issue. Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård (2015) argue that the increase in men's involvement in the home has a strengthening effect on families in terms of reducing the risks of union dissolution and low levels of fertility, which they refer to as the second half of the gender revolution. Although there is evidence of men's increasing involvement in housework and childcare (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Sullivan, Billari, and Altintas 2014), the division of housework remains highly gendered with women bearing the lion's share of housework and childcare. Although the gender gap has diminished over time, this downward trend is mainly the result of women decreasing their share of unpaid work, rather than men increasing their share (Bittman et al. 2003; Evertsson and Neremo 2004; Hook 2010).

Much of the early research in this area is based on country-specific studies and fails to address the issue in a broader context. More recent studies have focused on cross-national variation in the gender division of unpaid work (e.g., Aliaga 2006; Anxo et al. 2011; Craig and Mullan 2010; Fuwa 2004; Hook 2010; Treas and Drobnič 2010); however, little attention has been directed towards distinguishing between sub-groups in the growing category of dual-earner couples (Ferree 1991). Dual-career couples are relevant research subjects, as they differ from dual-earner couples in that both partners have higher occupational positions (Lucchini, Saraceno, and Schizzerotto 2007). Dual-career couples tend to be more work-oriented and invested in their professional careers (Känsälä and Oinas 2016). This also suggests that dual-career couples face additional challenges in juggling their private lives with more demanding jobs and longer working hours, affecting the time available for housework. On the other hand, these couples also benefit from higher incomes, which enable them to outsource housework to a greater extent than other couples (Baxter, Hewitt, and Western 2009). A previous Finnish study suggests that dual-career couples share housework more equally than other couple types and that these differences cannot be totally explained by resources, working hours, or gender attitudes (Känsälä and Oinas 2016).

This study focuses on the division of housework among various couple-earner types across different European welfare regimes in regard to work–family policies and gender norms. Studying different couple-earner types from a cross-national comparative perspective can provide important insights into how time allocated to housework is handled by couples across different institutional contexts. The questions addressed are as follows. Does the division of housework vary by different couple-earner types? Do relative resources within the couple, time spent on paid work, gender role attitudes, and family structure reduce the variations in unpaid work between different couple-earner types? Can we detect variations in the gender gap regarding the division of housework across different welfare regimes, with different work–family reconciliation policies and gender norms? Due to data limitations, this study does not address the gendered division of childcare, although this is a very important issue in regards to gender equality in the labour market and within the household.

We begin with a review of theories and previous research on the division of housework, followed by a section on work–family policies and gender norms. The last section presents the results of a) the analyses of the association between various couple-earner types and men’s share of housework and men’s and women’s housework hours, and b) a cross-country analysis of the gendered division of housework in relation to work–family policies and social gender norms. The article concludes with a summary and discussion of the results.

## **2. Theoretical approaches to the division of housework**

The literature on the division of labour has grown extensively since the 1970s and the results are consistent: women do more housework and childcare than men. However, explanations of the gendered division of housework diverge and can be divided into two general theoretical frameworks, an economic perspective and a gender perspective (e.g., Geist 2005; Greenstein 2000; Sayer 2010).

### **2.1 Economic explanations**

The specialized human capital perspective (Becker 1993) assumes that the allocation of paid and unpaid work is a rational arrangement between the partners, driven by a utility maximisation of the common good. The partner earning less from paid work is assumed to do a larger share of the unpaid work, whereas the partner who earns most will specialize in the labour market to maximise the household income (see Coverman 1985; Geist 2005; Gupta 2007). A related perspective is the time-availability approach. The

premise is that the amount of time spent on domestic work is strongly affected by the time available for such tasks; hence the more hours spent in the labour market, the less time is available for housework (Coverman 1985; Greenstein 2000; Sayer 2010). This has been confirmed by several studies, i.e., full-time working women across different countries tend to spend less time on housework. However, the results are less consistent for men (e.g., Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bianchi et al. 2000; Fuwa 2004).

These perspectives have been challenged on many fronts. They are gender-neutral and consider households as a homogenous single unit whose members are assumed to have similar goals and preferences, and fail to take power relations into account (e.g., Agarwal 1997; Lundberg and Pollak 1996). Second, the causality is difficult to disentangle: whether women are doing fewer hours in the labour market because they are doing the majority of housework, or whether women are doing most of the housework because they are spending fewer hours in paid work (Evertsson and Neramo 2007).

A third approach is the relative-resources bargaining approach, according to which the division of housework reflects the power relations within the household and the distribution of resources between partners (Bianchi et al. 2000; Brines 1994; Coverman 1985). The assumption is that housework is something undesired, and that the more resources a person has the more power he/she has to negotiate away housework (Evertsson and Neramo 2004). A partner's relatively higher income, education, and occupational prestige are assumed to translate into more negotiating power (Bianchi et al. 2000; Evertsson and Neramo 2004). The relative-resources bargaining approach suggests that housework will be more equally divided within couples where both partners possess similar resources. Previous research confirms this assumption: women tend to decrease their time spent on housework as their earnings increase, but, whatever the earning arrangements, they contribute more time to housework than men only to a certain point (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Evertsson and Neramo 2007; Greenstein 2000; Killewald and Gough 2010). There is also evidence that highly educated men spend more time on housework and childcare than less-educated men (Sullivan, Billari, and Altintas 2014), while highly educated women spend less time on housework than less-educated women (Treas and Tai 2016). Results regarding partners' relative education are less conclusive across institutional contexts (see Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bianchi et al. 2000; Evertsson and Neramo 2004).

## **2.2 Gender explanations**

The gender perspective is referred to under several different labels (see Coltrane 2000 for an overview), such as “doing gender” or “gender display” (Berk 1985; West and Zimmermann 1987). The basic premise is that housework is a symbolic production of gender relations (Berk 1985; West and Zimmermann 1987). It is assumed that people’s behaviour is influenced by the expectations held by others (Bittman et al. 2003) and that the performance of unpaid housework is one way to ensure an expected gendered behaviour and to define gender relations within the household (Coltrane 2000; Berk 1985; Bianchi et al. 2000; West and Zimmermann 1987). This may be most evident in couples with children, where employed mothers tend to spend significantly more time on housework and childcare than fathers (Craig and Mullan 2010). The gender perspective has been useful as an alternative explanation to the gendered division of housework in households where the woman has the higher income or employment status yet is still performing the majority of the housework. In such couples, the couple tends to compensate for their less traditional economic relationship with a more traditional division of housework (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Evertsson and Neramo 2004; Greenstein 2000).

A related perspective is the gender ideology approach. According to Greenstein (2000), gender ideologies are how people identify themselves with regard to intra-household roles: roles traditionally linked to gender. It is within the household and within intimate relations that these ideologies are exhibited and played out. The assumption is that the division of housework is the result of shared values within a couple, and that more egalitarian gender ideologies will lead to a more equal division of housework (Greenstein 2000). This has been corroborated by previous studies (e.g., Bianchi et al. 2000; Crompton, Brockmann, and Lyonette 2005; Kan 2008; Treas and Tai 2016).

## **3. Cross-national differences in the division of housework**

Previous research regarding the division of housework shows that the extent of this gender difference varies according to institutional context (e.g., Aliaga 2006; Batalova and Cohen 2002; Davies and Greenstein 2004). Geist (2005) argues that the differences in the division of housework cannot solely be explained by differences in individual characteristics as they are also shaped by contextual factors. Several empirical studies corroborate this argument. For instance, housework is shared more equally in the Nordic countries than in more conservative welfare regimes such as Italy and Austria (Geist 2005). This is also the case in countries with longer parental leave policies and

no gender-discriminatory policy (Fuwa and Cohen 2007). In addition, men's unpaid work is higher in countries with higher female labour force participation, and fathers do more housework in countries where fathers are entitled to parental leave but do less in countries with long maternity leave (Hook 2010). Parents tend to share housework less equally, compared to non-parents, in countries with less public institutional support for work–family reconciliation (Craig and Mullan 2010). Treas and Tai (2016) find that both men and women spend less time on housework in countries with more egalitarian gender norms, and Fuwa (2004) asserts that the equalising impact of gender ideology and time availability is stronger for women in more egalitarian countries.

#### **4. Work–family policies and gender norms in different welfare states**

Countries vary considering the extent to which work–family policies reinforce gendered responsibilities for unpaid and paid work (e.g., Cooke 2006; Korpi 2000; Orloff 1993). Previous studies have shown that social support from the state influences mothers' labour market participation and attachment (see Allen et al. 2013; Misra, Budig, and Boeckman 2011; Keck and Saraceno 2013). Pfau-Effinger (2012) argues that gender norms also explain cross-national differences in female labour force participation.

This section discusses work–family policies and gender norms in ten European countries. The countries selected here represent typical cases of welfare regimes within the EU, mainly based on Korpi's (2000) typologies: the dual-earner support model (Denmark, Finland and Sweden), the general family support model (Germany and the Netherlands), and the market-oriented model (the United Kingdom). Spain represents the southern model (Ferrera 1996), and Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland represent the post-socialist countries (Ferrarini 2006). In order to be able to capture the gender dimension of welfare regimes it is important to consider policies directly linked to women's ability to combine work and motherhood and that have an impact on the division of paid and unpaid work. Parental leave systems and formal childcare are relevant here, especially with respect to younger children, as indicators of policy support for work–family reconciliation and dual-earner arrangements (see Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1997; Leitner 2003). Although these policies concern childcare (unfortunately not included in this study), we can assume that to some extent they also shape the division of housework. These policy measures also reflect norms regarding work and family, as gender norms and policies are highly intertwined (Fahey, Nolan, and Whelan 2003; Gregory and Milner 2009). Table 1



presents the parental leave systems<sup>2</sup> and Figure 1 displays norms regarding women's role in work and childcare in the ten selected countries.

**Table 1: Parental leave and childcare in ten European countries (2010–12)**

	DK	FI	SW	DE	NL	UK	ES	CZ	HU	PL
<b>Full-rate equivalent of paid leave benefit in weeks (1)</b>										
FRE of paid maternity leave	9.6	11.7	8	14	16	12.7	16	19.3	16.8	18
FRE of paid paternity leave	1.1	4.9	8	5.4	0.4	0.4	3	–	1	2
FRE of paid parental leave	17.1	32.8	38.6	34.8	4.9	–	–	39.4	79.6	19.4
<b>Formal childcare for children under 3 years</b>										
Enrolment rate in formal day-care (2)	78	28	51	20	50	35	38	2	9	2
% attending childcare for 30 hours or more/week (2)	68	20	33	13	6	4	18	0	8	0
Childcare fees per two-year old in % of average wage (formal childcare and education services) (3)	13.6	12.2	5	23.1	55.8	24.7	24.6	10.6	0	12.6

Country abbreviations: DK=Denmark, FI=Finland, SW=Sweden, DE=Germany, NL=Netherlands, UK=United Kingdom, ES=Spain, CZ=Czech Republic, HU= Hungary, PL=Poland.

Source: 1) OECD 2013a, 2) Eurostat 2014, 3) OECD 2013b [data from 2008].

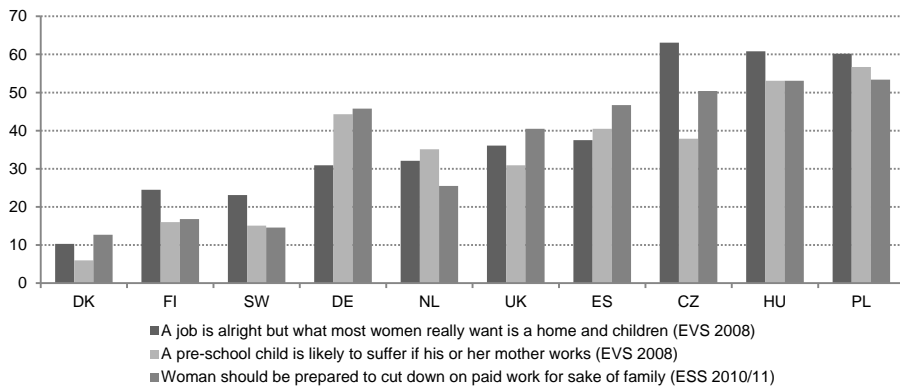
The Nordic countries display less traditional gender norms. Here both policies and norms encourage a more equally shared division of responsibility for childcare and income, and the provision of formal childcare is regarded as a social right (Plantenga and Remery 2009). The total full-rate equivalent (FRE) of paid leave<sup>3</sup> is relatively generous, and fathers in Sweden and Finland are entitled to a FRE of paid paternity leave for more than a month (as are fathers in Germany) (Table 1), which can be regarded as a relatively egalitarian leave policy. The Central Eastern European (CEE) countries display the most traditional gender norms (Figure 1). These are countries with low provision of formal childcare, which can be linked to long parental leave. The FRE of paid maternal/parental leave is relatively generous (Table 1), but with low provision of paid paternity leave. This policy combination can be regarded as less egalitarian as it encourages women to withdraw from the labour market for several years after having children (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). Intermediate gender norms are found in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, and Spain (Figure 1). These are countries with

<sup>2</sup> The specific policies are those in place when the fifth round of European Social Survey was collected in 2010/11.

<sup>3</sup> The full-rate equivalent (FRE) of paid leave is used here to compare parental leave systems, with different payment rates and durations of paid leave, across countries. The FRE of paid leave is the duration of paid leave if it were paid at 100% of previous earnings (OECD 2013a).

unpaid or short FTE of paid parental leave, low provision of paid paternity leave (Germany is the exception), and intermediate levels of childcare provision (Germany and the Netherlands), or expensive childcare provision (the United Kingdom and Spain), mainly on a part-time basis (Table 1). This is also mirrored in the relatively high proportion of part-time working women (Anxo et al. 2007) – with the exception of Spain, which has an overall low employment rate for mothers of pre-schoolers (OECD 2010). This policy combination can be regarded as less egalitarian than the policy combination in the Nordic countries.

**Figure 1: Gender-role attitudes related to women’s role in work and family in ten European countries – Proportion that agrees with the three statements (men and women aged 20–65)**



Source: European Values Survey (EVS 2008); European Social Survey (ESS 2010/2011). Author's own calculation

## 5. Hypotheses

### 5.1 Individual-level hypotheses

According to the relative resource/bargaining approach and previous research (e.g., Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bittman et al. 2003; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Evertsson and Neremo 2007; Killewald and Gough 2010), we can expect that

(H1) *dual-career couples share housework more equally.*

This is due to the fact that both parties have relatively strong resources in terms of occupational status and therefore have better bargaining positions, but also that they may face more time constraints caused by longer working hours, resulting in less time available for housework. When women are more dependent on their spouses the division of housework tends to be more traditional; hence we can assume that

(H2) *the division of housework is more unequal in male-career and single-male earner couples.*<sup>4</sup>

The relative resource/bargaining approach and previous research also suggest that a partner's relatively higher occupational prestige can translate into a more equal division of housework (e.g., Evertsson and Neramo 2004). This suggests that

(H3a) *the division of housework in female-career and single-female-earner couples<sup>5</sup> is more equal.*

However, according to the 'doing gender' approach, women with more resources tend to counterbalance their less traditional division of paid work with a more traditional division of housework (e.g., Bittman et al. 2003; Greenstein 2000). We would therefore expect that

(H3b) *the division of housework in female-career and single-female-earner couples is more traditional.*

Higher socioeconomic status is usually accompanied by less time available for housework, higher education, higher income, and less traditional gender ideology: all factors that promote a more equal division of housework (e.g., Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Evertsson and Neramo 2004; Fuwa 2004; Sullivan, Billari, and Altintas 2014; Treas and Tai 2016). Hence if the division of housework is mainly affected by time availability, gender ideology, and other relative resources, distinct from occupational position, we can expect that

(H4) *the difference between various couple-earner types disappears when controlling for these factors.*

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<sup>4</sup> *Male-career couples* are defined as couples in which the man has the higher professional position, and *single-male-earner couples* are defined as couples where only the man is in paid work, regardless of his occupational position.

<sup>5</sup> *Female-career couples* are defined as couples in which the woman has the higher professional position, and *single-female-earner couples* are defined as couples where only the woman is in paid work, regardless of her occupational position.

## 5.2 Country-level hypothesis

Previous studies have shown that the division of housework is embedded in societal and institutional contexts. In countries with strong policy support for work–family reconciliation and less traditional gender norms, women are expected to be as equally integrated into the labour market as men and men to be more involved in the household. This institutional context may therefore weaken gender differences in the division of housework, especially among dual-working couples. In countries with weaker policy support for work–family reconciliation and more traditional gender norms, women are expected to be the prime carer and men the prime earner. This institutional context may therefore reinforce gender differences in the division of housework. We can therefore expect that

(H5) *strong policy support for work–family reconciliation and more egalitarian gender norms generate smaller gender differences in the division of housework, and weaker policy support and more traditional gender norms generate larger gender differences.*

## 6. Data and methods

The present study uses data from the fifth round of the European Social Survey (ESS) conducted in 2010/11, applied in 20 European countries. The sample is representative of all persons older than 15 years of age in each country. The present study uses data from ten countries and comprises 7,761 respondents aged 18–65, living with an opposite sex partner. Multivariate linear regressions are the tool of analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Three dependent variables are used to measure different aspects of the division of housework: 1) men’s share of all housework during a week, 2) women’s housework hours, and 3) men’s housework hours. Housework includes cooking, washing, cleaning, care of clothes, shopping, and maintenance of property. Childcare and leisure activities are not included in the ESS data. One person in the household answered questions about themselves and their partner.<sup>7</sup> Given the fact that respondents generally overestimate their own housework contribution and underestimate their spouse’s contribution due to social desirability (Coltrane 2000; Kamo 2000), the variables are constructed so as to reduce bias in housework reporting: men’s share of the total housework is the man’s proportional share of both partner’s combined housework hours during a week.

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<sup>6</sup> Weights are used to correct for differences in sample design (ESS 2011).

<sup>7</sup> The questions asked were “About how many hours a week, in total, do you personally spend on housework?” and “About how many hours a week does your partner spend on housework?”

Women's housework hours are based on the female respondent's account or the male respondent's estimate regarding his spouse's housework hours during a week. Men's housework hours are estimated accordingly (see Käsälä and Oinas 2016 for a similar calculation).

The main independent variable of interest is couple-earner type, based on a combination of both parties' occupational position. The variable is divided into six categories. *Dual-career couples*: both the man and woman have managerial or professional positions, based on the International Standard Classification of Occupation (ISCO88), major groups 1–2 (ILO 2014). *Dual-earner couples*: neither the man nor the woman has managerial or professional positions, but both are in paid work. *Male-career couples*: dual-earner couples in which only the man has a managerial or professional position. *Female-career couples*: dual-earner couples in which only the woman has a managerial or professional position. The analysis also includes *male-single-earner couples*, regardless of the man's occupational position, and *female-single-earner couples*, regardless of the woman's occupational position.

Apart from the couple's occupational positions, various indicators of time availability and other resources are included in the analysis. The indicator of time availability is the man's and the woman's working hours, each divided into three categories: 1) less than 35 hours per week, 2) 35–40 hours per week, and 3) more than 40 hours per week. The indicators of resources are relative level of education and woman's economic independence. Couple's education is categorised as: 1) both have less than tertiary education, 2) both have tertiary education, 3) man has tertiary education but not the woman, and 4) woman has tertiary education but not the man. Woman's economic independence is based on the stated proportion of household income provided by the respondent, with the variable ranging from 0 (none) to 6 (all). If the respondent is a man the scale is reversed, with a high value indicating that the woman's economic independence is high.

To control for gender ideology, gender role attitudes related to work and family are included in the analysis. The gender role measure is an index ranging from 0 (traditional attitudes) to 8 (egalitarian attitudes) based on the sum of the statements: "women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of the family" and "men should have more right to jobs than women when jobs are scarce." The Cronbach's Alpha for the two items is 0.64, which is applicable. The data is restricted only to the respondent's gender attitudes, yet previous studies have suggested that men's and women's gender attitudes, within the same institutional context, are similar (Fahlén 2013). This is tested and confirmed by comparing the mean value of gender role attitudes for men with that for women across the ten countries included in this study, and by testing for interactions between respondent's gender and the gender role attitude measure. No such interactions were found.

Country dummies are included to account for country differences in the division of housework. Other control variables included are woman's age, respondent's gender, and family structure. Earlier studies have found that the presence of younger children and the number of children increase the time spent on housework (Anxo et al 2011; Davies and Greenstein 2004).

Two standardised indices are constructed to capture institutional differences regarding work–family reconciliation policies (three indicators of statutory leave benefits – maternity, paternity, and parental leave – and three indicators of childcare for younger children) and gender norms (three indicators) (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Each indicator, in both indices, is transformed into z-scores, denoting standard deviations from the mean, and summarised into an index. In the work–family reconciliation policies, maternity and parental leave are added together prior to the z-score transformation, as mothers use these types of leave the most often. High scores in work–family reconciliation policies denote more policy support for work–family reconciliation, and high gender-norm index scores indicate more egalitarian gender norms. The correlation between the two indices is 0.55 (Table 2).

**Table 2: Standardised index scores of work–family policies and gender norms**

	Work–family policy index	Gender norm index
Denmark	3.55	4.57
Finland	1.40	2.94
Sweden	4.68	3.20
Germany	0.39	–0.84
Netherlands	–3.82	0.85
United Kingdom	–2.86	–0.02
Spain	–0.95	–1.04
Czech Republic	–1.80	–2.53
Hungary	1.45	–3.47
Poland	–2.04	–3.67
Correlation		0.55

## 7. Results

The first concern is to examine whether the division of housework varies by couple-earner type. The descriptive statistics (Table 3) show that men's average share of total housework is around 30%, equivalent to about 8 hours of housework per week. The average for women is around 19 hours a week. Dual-career couples tend to share housework more equally than dual-earner couples, male-career-earner couples, and

male-single-earner couples. Female-career-earner couples and female-single-earner couples divide housework the most equally. The most unequal division of housework is found among the male-single-earners. However, women do most of the housework regardless of couple-earner type (Table 3).

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the independent variables by average and by couple-earner types in the working sample (men and women aged 20–65, living in a couple)**

	Men's share of housework	Women's housework hours	Men's housework hours	Number of cases	% of total
Dual-earner couples	29.7	19.0	8.0	3,672	47.3
Dual-career couples	35.3	14.7	7.9	930	12.0
Male-career couples	30.7	16.5	7.1	1,056	13.6
Female-career couples	36.4	14.6	8.4	741	9.6
Male-single-earner couples	21.6	29.6	7.4	986	12.7
Female-single-earner couples	40.2	17.2	12.7	376	4.8
<i>Average</i>	30.6	19.0	8.1	7,761	100.0

Multivariate linear regressions are conducted to investigate the association between couple-earner type and the division of housework, with separate analyses for the three indicators of the division of housework (Table 4). The first model (1:1), regarding men's share of housework, includes only the couple-earner types. In the second model (1:2), working hours, relative resources, and gender role attitudes are introduced, along with respondent's age, respondent's gender, and family structure. This is to test whether these factors alter the association between couple-earner type and the division of housework. In the last model (1:3), countries are included in the analyses to account for potential variation in couple-earner types and other control variables by country, and to detect country differences in the division of housework that cannot be explained by variations in the other independent variables. To further examine the underlying causes of men's share of housework, women's and men's actual housework hours are considered. These analyses are conducted in one step only (Model 2 and Model 3).

In Model 1:1, as shown in Table 3, men's average share of housework in dual-earner couples is less than 30%. Corroborating the first assumption that dual-career couples share housework more equally (H1), men's contribution to total housework is 5.7 percentage points higher in dual-career couples than in dual-earner couples. The second assumption (H2), that the division of housework is more unequal in male-career couples and single-male-earner couples, is only supported in regard to male-single-earner couples when men's share of the housework is 8.1 percentage points lower than dual-earner couples. The gender approach, that female-career couples and single-

female-earner couples compensate for their less traditional division of paid work with a more traditional division of housework (H3b), is not supported. Instead, we find that men's share of housework is higher in female-career couples (6.8 percentage points) and female-single-earner couples (10.6 percentage points) than in dual-earner couples, supporting the resource/bargaining approach which assumes that a partner's relatively higher occupational prestige can translate into a more equal division of housework (H3a).

The difference in men's share of housework across couple-earner types decreases when taking into account the time availability indicator, relative resources, gender role attitude, woman's age, and family structure (Model 1:2). These factors increase the explained variance in the dependent variable by 17 percentage points and most of it derives from the couples' working hours and relative resources. Nevertheless, the pattern remains the same: compared with dual-earner couples, men's share of housework is higher in dual-career couples (1.4 percentage points), female-career couples (2.3 percentage points), and female single-earner couples (3.5 percentage points), and lower in male single-earner couples (-3 percentage points).



**Table 4: OLS regressions of the division of housework, with separate analyses for men's share of housework, women's housework hours, and men's housework hours (HH's). Unstandardized b-coefficients**

	Men's share of housework			Women's HHs		Men's HHs
	Model 1:1	Model 1:2	Model 1:3	Model 2	Model 3	
<b>Couple type</b>						
<i>Dual-earner couples (ref.)</i>						
Male-single-earner	-8.11 ***	-2.97 ***	-3.30 ***	5.82 ***		-0.51
Male-career couples	1.02	0.95	0.75	-1.42 ***		-0.34
Dual-career couples	5.65 ***	1.44 *	1.43 *	-1.93 ***		-0.46
Female-career couples	6.78 ***	2.28 ***	2.35 ***	-1.82 ***		-0.05
Female-single-earner	10.58 ***	3.54 ***	3.98 ***	-0.02		2.54 ***
<b>Woman's working hours</b>						
<i>35-40 h/w (ref.)</i>						
<35 h/w		-5.27 ***	-4.73 ***	2.77 *		-0.61 **
>40 h/w		1.14 *	1.10	-0.13		-0.04
<b>Man's working hours</b>						
<i>35-40 h/w (ref.)</i>						
<35 h/w		4.76 ***	4.63 ***	-1.00 *		1.72 ***
>40 h/w		-4.94 ***	-4.87 ***	0.99 ***		-1.46 ***
<b>Couple's education</b>						
<i>Both lower educ. (ref.)</i>						
Both tertiary level		4.17 ***	4.21 ***	-2.18 ***		0.59 *
Man tertiary education		0.65	0.90	-0.87		-0.17
Woman tertiary education		2.39 ***	2.15 ***	-1.06 *		0.20
<b>Woman's economic independence</b>						
Eco. indep.^2		4.45 ***	3.85 ***	-3.53 ***		0.34
Egalitarian gender attitudes		-0.44 ***	-0.34 ***	0.47 ***		0.01
Respondent's gender		1.26 ***	0.92 ***	-0.47 ***		0.12 *
<b>Respondent's gender</b>						
Woman=1 ( <i>Man ref.</i> )		-5.25 ***	-5.12 ***	0.80 **		-1.32 ***
Age (woman)		-0.14 ***	-0.14 ***	0.16 ***		0.02
<b>Family composition</b>						
<i>Childless (ref.)</i>						
Child age 1-6		-2.49 **	-2.62 ***	3.22 ***		0.72 *
Child age 7+		-3.07 ***	-2.85 ***	0.39		-0.06
Moved out		-0.08	-0.74	1.32 *		0.94 **
Number of children		-0.76 **	-0.89 ***	2.12 ***		0.56 ***
<b>Country</b>						
<i>Sweden (ref.)</i>						
Denmark			-4.02 ***	-0.58		-1.67 ***
Finland			-2.10 *	-0.60		-1.41 ***
Germany			-7.95 ***	3.03 ***		-1.29 ***
Netherlands			-6.82 ***	1.78 **		-1.49 ***
United Kingdom			-6.86 ***	-0.91		-2.49 ***
Spain			-7.64 ***	4.91 ***		-0.72
Czech Republic			-5.20 ***	5.73 ***		1.60 ***
Hungary			-9.50 ***	9.33 ***		0.70
Poland			-4.51 ***	10.35 ***		3.09 ***
Constant	29.67 ***	31.29 ***	39.14 ***	10.96 ***		6.75 ***
Adj. R	0.06	0.23	0.25	0.29		0.09
N	7761	7761	7761	7761		7761

\*\*\*p ≤0.001; \*\*p ≤0.01; \*p ≤0.05

In the last model (1:3), countries are included. The results suggest that in regard to men's share of housework, the variation in the division of housework across countries does not greatly alter the association between couple-earner types or the other independent variables.

To further unravel the mechanism underlying the diversity across couple-earner types, women's and men's actual housework hours are considered (Model 2 and Model 3). The results suggest that men's more equal share of the housework in dual-career couples and female-career couples is related mainly to the fact that women in these couple types spend about 1.9–1.8 hours less on housework than women in dual-earner couples (Model 2). The difference between couple-earner types in regard to men's actual housework hours is only minor, except in female single-earner couples where men on average spend 2.5 hours more on housework per week compared with dual-earner couples (Model 3).

The result in regard to the control variables lends support to the theories discussed in the previous section. Working hours display a clear association with the division of housework: men's share of housework and actual housework hours decrease, while women's actual housework hours increase if the woman works part-time (Model 1:3; Model 2; Model 3). Women's long working hours mainly reduce men's share of housework (Model 1:3), while men's long working hours reduce men's share of housework and actual housework hours (Model 1:3, Model 3). This supports the time availability assumption, i.e., the more the hours spent in the labour market, the less the time that is devoted to housework. In addition, high educational levels within the couple, or only the woman having tertiary education, have an equalizing impact on men's share of housework (Model 1:3). However, this is mainly the result of the fact that women in these couples spend fewer hours on housework than women in low-educated couples (Model 2). We can also observe that the woman having higher education than the man has a stronger equalizing impact on the man's share of housework and woman's actual housework hours than the man having higher education than the woman (Model 1:3, Model 2). Men's share of housework increases when women's economic independence decreases (Model 1:3). This association is slightly curvilinear, implying that the increase in the men's share evens out when the women's income contribution is high. This is also seen with respect to women's actual housework hours (Model 2), but not for men's actual housework hours (Model 3), corroborating the gender approach assumption that women tend to compensate for their strong economic independence with a more traditional division of housework. Further, the gender ideology approach suggests that more egalitarian gender attitudes are associated with a more equal division of housework, which is supported by the results. Men's share of housework is greater in couples with more egalitarian gender role attitudes (Model 1:3). Again, this is mainly the result of the fact that women in such

couples do less housework (Model 2), suggesting that a more egalitarian gender ideology mainly reduces women's housework. Considering the family structure, having children clearly changes the division of housework. Men's share of housework decreases with the age of the youngest child and the number of children in the household, compared to those without children (Model 1:3). This is mainly due to mothers increasing their hours of housework when a child is young or as the number of children increases (Model 2). This result also shows huge variation across countries. Men's share of housework is larger in Sweden than in the other countries (Model 1:3). Women in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and the United Kingdom spend the least amount of time on housework (Model 2), while men in Sweden, the Czech Republic, and Poland spend the most time on housework (Model 3). No significant interactions between countries and the other independent variables were found. The models were also tested for multicollinearity, especially in relation to couple earning types. The diagnostic showed no severe multicollinearity.

To explore the relationship between the institutional context and the division of housework, we look at the gender difference between women's and men's average housework, based on the unadjusted mean scores (Table 5). We already know that time availability, relative resources, gender ideology, and family structure affect the division of housework, and the unadjusted means scores capture the country-specific average regardless of these other factors. This section focuses on dual-earner couples and dual-career couples only, as these couples likely face greater challenges in achieving work-life balance.

We expected strong policy support for work-family reconciliation and more egalitarian gender norms to generate smaller gender differences in time spent on housework, and weaker policy support and more traditional gender norms to generate larger gender differences in the division of housework (H5). Figures 2 and 3 confirm these assumptions to some extent, yet somewhat differently across the dual-earner types and by policy and norms.

**Table 5: Unadjusted mean of women’s housework hours, men’s housework hours, and gender difference in housework hours, by dual-earner type and country**

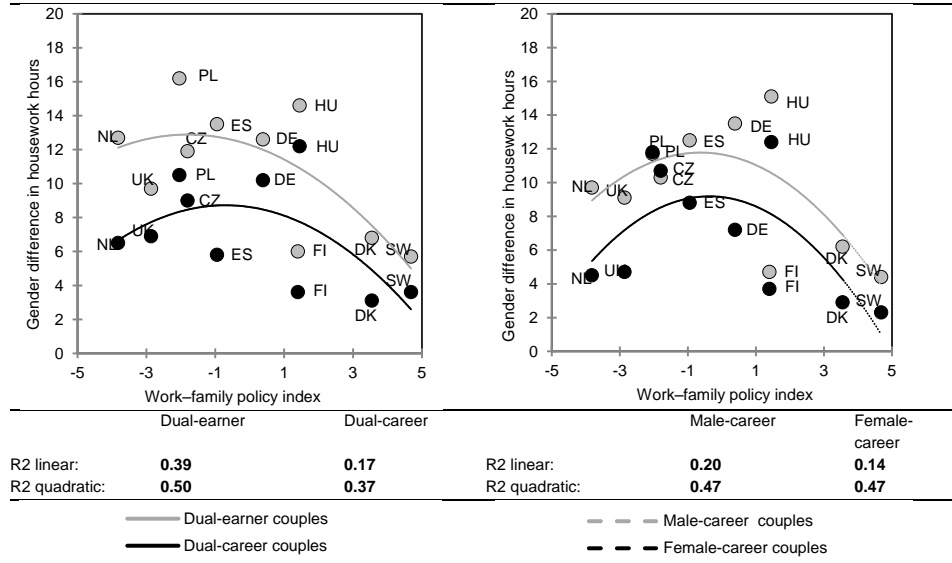
	DK	FI	SW	DE	NL	UK	ES	CZ	HU	PL
<b>Women’s housework hours</b>										
Dual-earner couples	14	14	14.7	19.5	19.2	15.7	21.3	21.6	24.3	27.5
Dual-career couples	11.7	10.6	12.6	16.6	13	12.5	15	18.2	19.8	22.1
Male-career couples	13.0	11.8	12.9	19.8	16.9	15.1	19.6	19.2	22.7	21.3
Female-career couples	12.4	12.2	11.8	14.1	12.6	10.1	17.7	19.5	21.4	22.9
<b>Men’s housework hours</b>										
Dual-earner couples	7.2	8	9	6.9	6.5	6	7.8	9.7	9.7	11.3
Dual-career couples	8.6	7	9	6.4	6.5	5.6	9.2	9.2	7.6	11.6
Male-career couples	6.82	7.09	8.53	6.26	7.20	5.95	7.10	7.69	7.56	9.58
Female-career couples	9.53	8.52	9.48	6.89	8.13	5.38	8.85	8.82	9.03	11.11
<b>Gender difference in housework hours</b>										
Dual-earner couples	6.8	6.0	5.7	12.6	12.7	9.7	13.5	11.9	14.6	16.2
Dual-career couples	3.1	3.6	3.6	10.2	6.5	6.9	5.8	9.0	12.2	10.5
Male-career couples	6.18	4.71	4.37	13.54	9.70	9.15	12.50	11.51	15.14	11.72
Female-career couples	2.87	3.68	2.32	7.21	4.47	4.72	8.85	10.68	12.37	11.79

Country abbreviations: DK=Denmark, FI=Finland, SW=Sweden, DE=Germany, NL=the Netherlands, UK=the United Kingdom, ES=Spain, CZ=the Czech Republic, HU=Hungary, PL=Poland.

The association between the work–family policy index and gender difference in housework is curvilinear for all couple types, and most so for female-career couples, as seen in the R2 quadratic value when compared with the R2 linear value. Nevertheless, the association is strongest for dual-earner couples, indicating that the gender difference in housework is smaller in countries with stronger support for work–family reconciliation (the Nordic countries), and larger in countries with less support for work–family reconciliation, such as Poland, Hungary, and Spain, followed by the Netherlands and Germany.

The association between the work–family policy index and gender difference in housework is less straightforward among the dual-career couples, female-career couples, and male-career couples. Among dual-career couples and male-career couples, the gender difference in housework is smallest in the Nordic countries. Among female-career couples this is also true for the Netherlands and the UK, countries scoring lowest on the policy index (Figure 2).

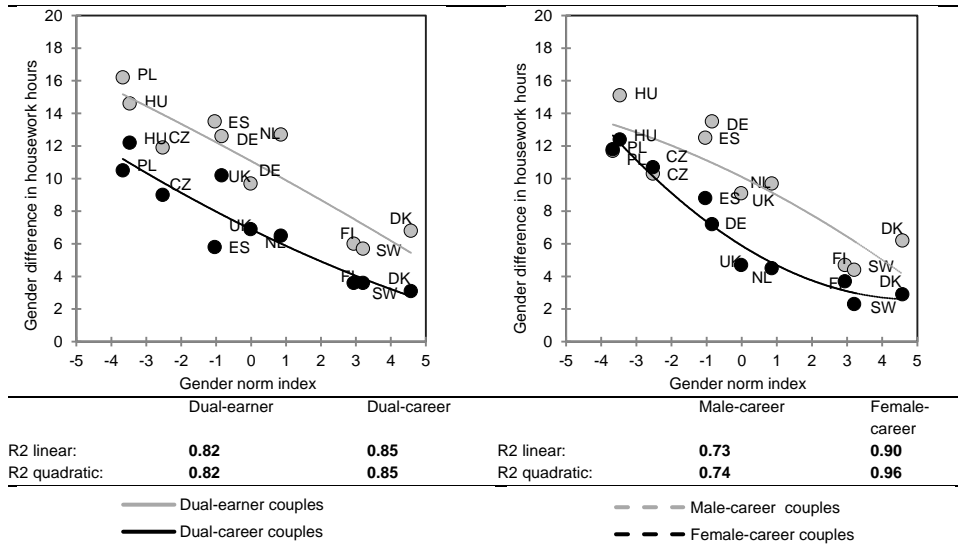
**Figure 2: Work–family policy index and gender differences in housework by dual-earner type and country (R2 value for linear and curvilinear estimates)**



Country abbreviations: DK=Denmark, FI=Finland, SW=Sweden, DE=Germany, NL=the Netherlands, UK=the United Kingdom, ES=Spain, CZ=the Czech Republic, HU=Hungary, PL=Poland.

In regard to gender norms, H5 receives the strongest support; i.e., that more egalitarian gender norms generate smaller gender differences in time spent on housework, while more traditional gender norms generate larger gender differences in the division of housework. The association between the gender norm index and gender differences in housework is very strong for all dual-earner couple types. Even though this association is strongest for female-career couples and dual-career couples, we can observe that the gender difference in housework is largest in countries with more traditional gender norms, such as the CEE countries, and smallest in countries with less traditional gender norms, such as the Nordic countries (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Gender norm index and gender differences in housework by dual-earner type and country (R2 value for linear and curvilinear estimates)**



Country abbreviations: DK=Denmark, FI=Finland, SW=Sweden, DE=Germany, NL=the Netherlands, UK=the United Kingdom, ES=Spain, CZ=the Czech Republic, HU=Hungary, PL=Poland.

## 8. Summary and conclusions

While women’s labour force participation has increased during the past decades, men have not increased their housework participation to a corresponding extent. The aim of this article is to examine the division of housework among various couple-earner types and to test whether relative resources within the couple, time spent on paid work, gender role attitudes, and family structure reduce variations in unpaid work between different couple-earner types. The objective was also to examine whether the division of housework varies across different welfare regimes in terms of work–family reconciliation policies and gender norms.

The empirical analysis shows that dual-career couples, as well as female-career couples and female single-earner couples, share housework more equally than dual-earner couples. The difference in men’s share of housework across couple-earner types decreases, but is not totally reduced, when controlling for time availability, relative

resources, gender role attitudes, family structure, and country differences. This indicates that these factors cannot explain the differences between couple-earner types.

The result also shows, consistent with previous research, that time availability, relative resources, and gender ideology have an important impact on the division of housework (e.g., Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Evertsson and Neramo 2007; Fuwa 2004; Killewald and Gough 2010; Kan 2008). Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that occupational positions within a couple are relevant to understanding how time is allocated to cope with the demands of work and home.

To further examine the underlying causes that determine men's share of housework, women's and men's actual housework hours were considered. These results indicate that the differences in men's share of total housework across couple-earner types are mainly due to women's actual housework hours, except for in female-single-earner couples. Women, especially in dual-career couples and female-career couples, perform less housework than women in dual-earner couples. Hence, the unexpected finding that male-career couples do not share housework more unequally is a reflection of the fact that working women in these couples spend less time on housework than working women in dual-earner couples, rather than that career men spend more time on housework, supporting the time availability approach.

These results confirm previous studies showing that the diminishing gender gap in housework is an effect of women decreasing their housework hours rather than men increasing their hours (Bittman et al. 2003; Evertsson and Neramo 2004; Hook 2010). These results do not totally corroborate the gender approach, which suggests that couples with a less traditional economic relationship, such as female-career couples and female single-earner couples, tend to compensate with a more traditional division of housework (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Evertsson and Neramo 2004; Greenstein 2000). The fact that female-career couples divide their housework most equally lends support to the resource-bargaining approach. However, the gender approach applies when measuring woman's economic independence.

The results regarding men's and women's actual housework hours suggest that occupational position matters more for women than for men, as only minor differences across couple types were found among men, except for men in female single-earner couples. The resource bargaining approach appears to apply here, although this should be interpreted with caution, given that only 4.8% of the sample belongs to this category. Nevertheless, the results suggest that career women have managed to reduce their housework, but not as a result of increased housework by their partner. These couples may have solved the constraints related to work and home demands by outsourcing certain household tasks to the market, as suggested by Baxter, Hewitt, and Western (2009). Unfortunately, due to data limitations, this cannot be verified.

In a comparative gender perspective, the institutional approach contributes to an understanding of the gendered division of housework. Indeed, the results show huge variations in the division of housework across the ten European countries, which also vary between dual-earner couples, dual-career couples, male-career couples, and female-career couples. The association between work–family reconciliation policies and gender differences in housework is slightly stronger for dual-earner couples, indicating that men in dual-earner couples in countries with stronger support for work–family reconciliation do a larger share of the housework. It is here that we find the Nordic countries. The association is less straightforward for dual-career couples, male-career couples, and female-career couples, but still the Nordic countries stand out with smaller gender differences in housework. Nevertheless, this suggests that dual-earner couples and dual-career couples, and male-career couples and female-career couples face different challenges in regard to work and home demands and have different capabilities for coping with these challenges, especially in countries with weaker support for work–family reconciliation.

An interesting finding is that gender difference is relatively large in the Netherlands and Germany among dual-earner couples. These are countries that support part-time work, mainly used by women, and part-time childcare, which shape an unequal division of paid work and translate into an unequal division of housework. By contrast, we find relatively small gender differences in housework among female-career-earner couples in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, countries scoring lowest on the policy index. This suggests that within these policy contexts, women in female-career couples have greater bargaining power than women in dual-earner couples in regard to housework, despite relatively weak institutional support for work–family reconciliation.

The analysis also shows that the gender difference in housework is greatest in countries with more traditional gender norms. This holds true for all dual-earner couple types, but especially for female-career couples. This suggests that gender norms may be harder to challenge in these countries; hence women adapt to these norms by spending more time on housework. As a result, they are more vulnerable to a double workload.

This study has shown that institutional context shapes gender roles differently. This is clearest in regard to gender norms. However, in the Nordic countries – with policies encouraging a more equally shared division of caring and earning responsibilities – we see a relatively small gender gap in the division of housework. In contrast, the CEE countries – with policies promoting a more traditional division of paid and unpaid work – display a large gender gap in the division of housework.

The gendered division of housework is an important factor contributing to the persistent gender inequality in society at large, yet the results suggest that the second half of the gender revolution (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015) is



emerging. However, this is happening at a varied pace across the different European welfare states, suggesting that the design of work–family reconciliation policies may also have a role in shaping gender differences in housework across countries.

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