

Disagreements Over Household Chores and Men's and Women's Intention to Break Up

Liat Raz-Yurovich

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Department of Sociology, Demographic Studies

Federmann School of Public Policy and Government

+972-58-7015015, liat.raz@mail.huji.ac.il

Prior research has consistently demonstrated that women's labor supply is significantly influenced by their involvement in unpaid domestic work, and that they incur labor market penalties as a result of their family-related responsibilities (Blau and Kahn 2017; Ferrant et al. 2014; Gangl and Ziefle 2009). A key driver of these penalties is the unequal distribution of unpaid labor within households, which places a disproportionate burden on women in the domestic sphere (Hersch 2009; Powers 2003). Given that time within families is allocated among paid work, unpaid work, and leisure (Becker 1965; Gronau 1977), the gendered imbalance in unpaid labor contributes to more pronounced disadvantages for women. These disadvantages manifest both in reduced time available for paid employment (Carlson and Lynch 2017; Deding and Lausten 2006) and in diminished access to leisure time (Craig and Mullan 2013; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003).

With regard to unpaid work, the time spent on housework, is higher than the amount of time spent on childcare across gender, countries, and time (Raz-Yurovich 2016). Housework thus constitutes the primary component of domestic labor (Bianchi et al. 2012; DiPrete et al. 2003; Raz-Yurovich 2016), yet it is typically less valued than childcare by both partners (Robinson and Godbey 2010). It is also a frequent source of conflict within couples

(Hartmann 1981), and, importantly, it is less likely to be outsourced or supported through public reconciliation policies such as parental leave or subsidized childcare (Morel 2015; Raz-Yurovich and Marx 2018).

Gender revolution theory suggests that as men adopt more egalitarian gender role attitudes and participate more equally in housework and childcare, their relationships will become more stable (Goldscheider et al., 2015). Since women are more likely than men to initiate union dissolution (Kalmijn & Poortman, 2006; Sayer et al., 2011), the theory predicts that increases in men's gender egalitarianism may reduce the risk of relationship breakdown. However, a contrasting perspective—the “flip side” approach (Okun & Raz-Yurovich, 2019)—argues that increased gender equality does not necessarily lead to greater relationship stability. While women may benefit from a reduced domestic burden, men may experience fewer personal or instrumental gains from the partnership, potentially undermining its stability (Raz-Yurovich et al., 2025). While previous research analyzed whether greater gender egalitarianism in terms of gender role attitudes and time invested in housework reduce risks of actual union dissolution (Raz-Yurovich et al. 2025), the present study focuses on whether dynamics related to domestic chores contribute to relationship instability and increase the likelihood of intending to separate, among both male and female partners. More specifically, we analyze whether men and women who report frequent or very frequent disagreements with their partner over household chores are more likely to intend to break up relative to respondents who disagree about it less frequently. In addition, we investigate whether the respondent's satisfaction with the division of domestic labor moderates the association between such disagreements and the intention to end the partnership.

Method

This study draws on data from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Programme round 2 (GGP-II), using an analytical sample of 13,164 heterosexual partners aged 25 to 65 who are living together. The sample includes 5,992 male respondents and 7,172 female respondents across seven European countries: Germany (2021), the Netherlands (2022–2023), Norway (2020), Austria (2022–2023), Denmark (2021), Finland (2021), and the United Kingdom (2022–2023).

To assess dynamics within ongoing partnerships, we examine respondents' intention to break up (coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes) rather than actual separation. The key explanatory variable is the reported frequency of disagreements with the partner over household chores during the past 12 months, dichotomized as 0 = never, seldom, or sometimes, and 1 = frequently or very frequently. In addition, we investigate whether this association is moderated by the respondent's satisfaction with the division of household tasks, measured on a scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied), while controlling for a range of covariates. Control variables include characteristics of both partners: age, migration status, educational attainment, presence of a health-related limitation, employment status, and weekly working hours. Additional household-level controls include marital status (married or cohabiting), duration of the partnership, total number of children, and net household income. For respondents specifically, we also control for religiosity, overall life satisfaction, and attitudes toward divorce, as measured by agreement with the statement: "It is all right for a couple with an unhappy marriage to get a divorce even if they have children." All models include country fixed effects.

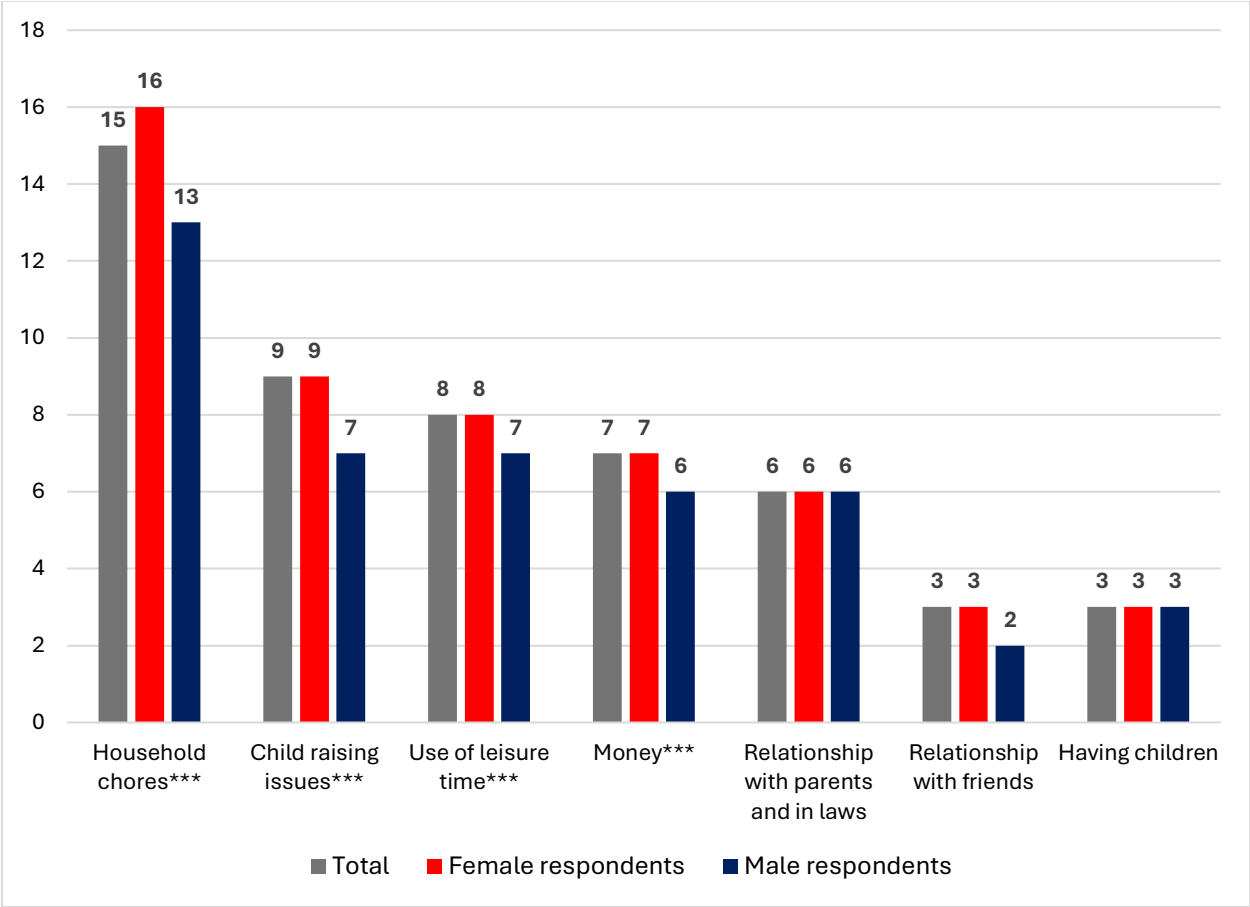
Analyses are conducted separately for male and female respondents. Model 1 includes the main effects of the frequency of disagreements over household chores and the respondent's satisfaction with the division of domestic labor, along with all control variables. Model 2 builds on Model 1 by introducing an interaction term between the frequency of disagreements and the level of satisfaction with the division of household tasks.

Results

Figure 1 presents the percentage of respondents who reported frequent or very frequent disagreements across various domains. As illustrated, the area of greatest discord between partners concerns household chores. Notably, female respondents report disagreement in this domain at a significantly higher rate (16%) than their male counterparts (13%).

Our multivariate logistic regression models reveal that conflicts related to division of housework and satisfaction with it are related but distinct dimensions. When a female respondent reports frequent or very frequent disagreements with her partner over household chores, the log-odds of her intending to end the relationship increase. In contrast, higher levels of satisfaction with the division of household labor are significantly associated with lower log-odds of intending to break up.

Figure 1: Percent of partners living together who within the last 12 months, frequently or very frequently disagreed about:



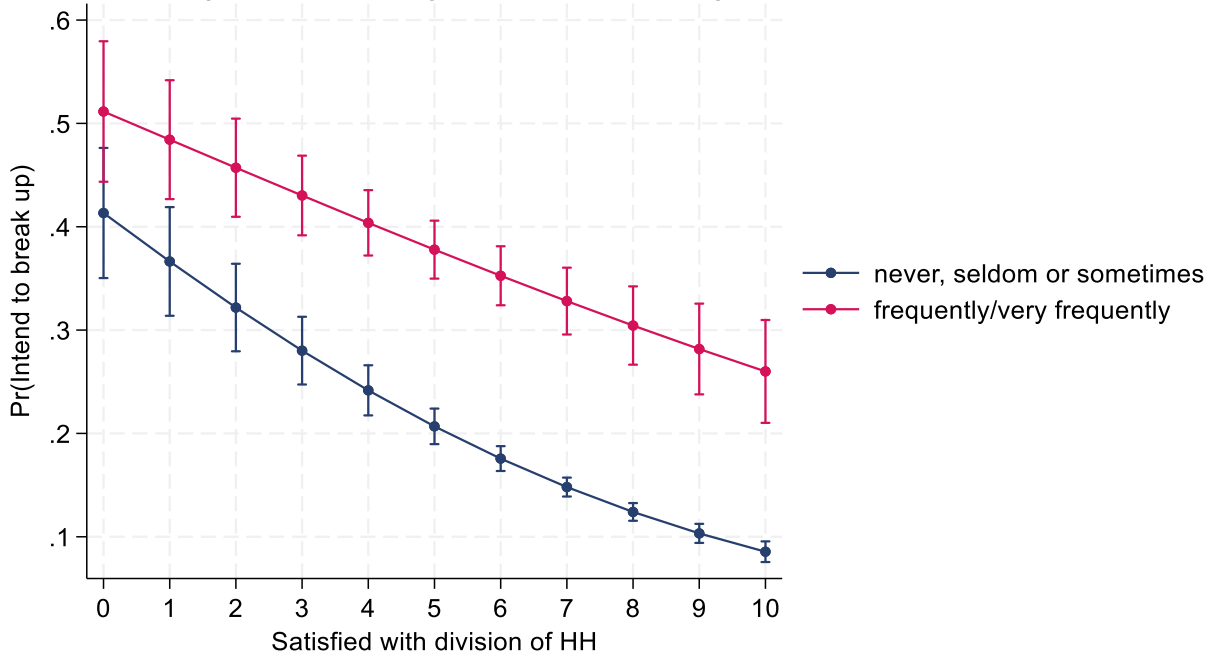
Source: GGP-II wave 1 for 7 countries (Germany (2021), Netherlands (2022-2023), Norway (2020), Austria (2022-2023), Denmark (2021), Finland (2021), and UK (2022-2023)).

***Significant differences between male and female partners ($p < .001$) according to a chi² test.

The interaction model (see the figure below) further demonstrates that greater satisfaction with the division of household tasks reduces the likelihood of intending to separate among women, regardless of how often disagreements occur. However, the protective effect of satisfaction is stronger among those who report infrequent or no disagreements, compared

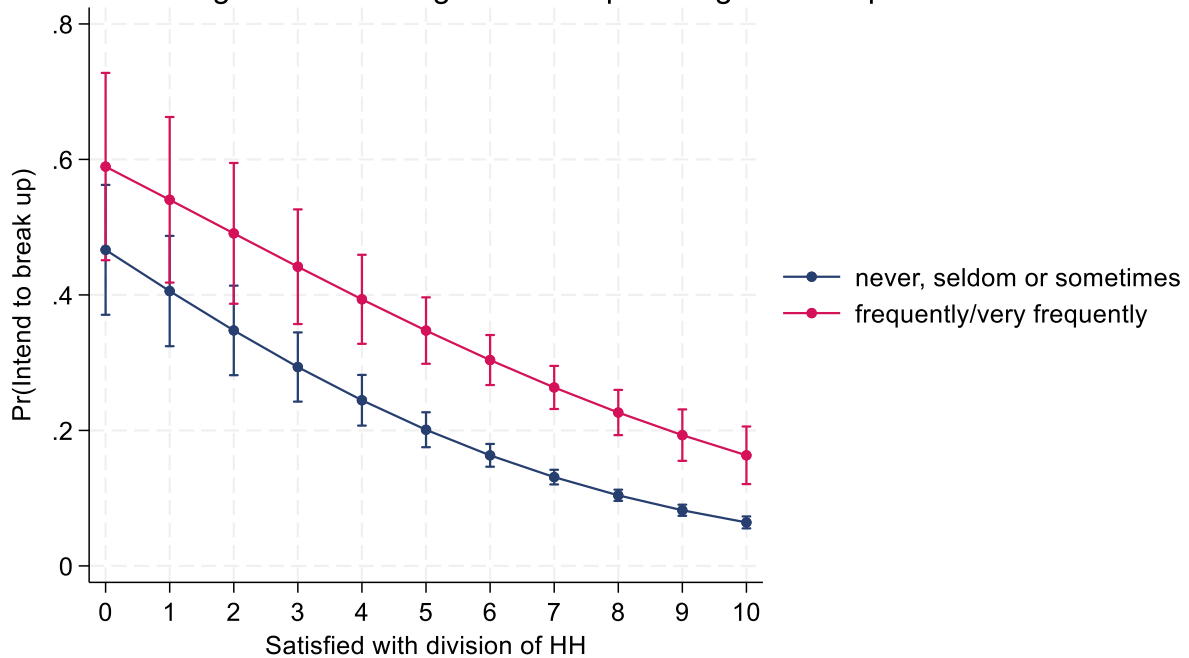
to those who report frequent or very frequent disagreements.

Predictive margins of intending to break up among female respondents with 95% CIs



Our findings further indicate that when a male respondent reports frequent or very frequent disagreements with his partner over household chores, the log-odds of his intending to end the relationship increase. Similarly, higher levels of satisfaction with the division of household labor are associated with lower log-odds of intending to break up among male respondents. In the interaction model for male respondents (see the figure below), the interaction term between disagreement frequency and satisfaction is not statistically significant. This suggests that the effect of satisfaction with the division of household labor on the intention to separate does not significantly differ between men who report frequent disagreements and those who report such disagreements less frequently.

Predictive margins of intending to break up among male respondents with 95% CIs



These findings highlight the gendered nature of domestic labor conflict and suggest that while equitable and satisfactory chore arrangements may enhance relationship stability, their impact differs by gender and the degree of conflict experienced. These results are discussed in light of a puzzle in previous research: despite persistent gender inequality in unpaid work, most men and women across developed countries perceive its division as fair.

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