

Satisfaction and Fairness in Household and Childcare Duties

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Introduction

Despite the significant advances that have occurred in recent decades, the division of unpaid work in households remains unequal. Women still maintain the role as the main caregivers, while men's contribution, although it has slightly increased, remains lower (Kan et al., 2011; Kan et al, 2022; Pailhé et al, 2021). Unbalanced divisions are often accepted and considered fair by both members of the couple. Many couples do not aspire to perfect equality and may limit expectations to the fact that the man contributes, even if it is in a minority (Koster et al., 2022). These low expectations may mean that a minimum male participation is interpreted as an advance with respect to more marked patterns of gender specialization (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and, therefore, that many women do not feel disadvantaged and show a 'high' satisfaction with the distribution of domestic tasks (Baxter et al., 2013).

Satisfaction with domestic work and care work also varies according to the cultural and institutional context (Leopold, 2019). In countries with egalitarian policies and higher expectations of co-responsibility, such as the Nordic countries, unequal divisions tend to generate more dissatisfaction, especially among women (Baxter et al., 2013). In contrast, in more traditional contexts, such as the Mediterranean, satisfaction can remain high even in the face of inequalities, because gender roles and domestic practices are perceived as coherent (Hu and Yucel, 2018).

Objectives and Hypotheses

Our aim is to explain the relationship between the perception of the division of reproductive labour and satisfaction and how this relationship differs according to the sex, country and different socioeconomic factors. We expect that a more equal distribution of tasks will be associated with higher levels of satisfaction with the distribution and that the gender differences will be significant in both dimensions: Distribution of tasks and satisfaction (Almirall et al., 2025). At the same time, satisfaction does not depend only on the perceived distribution, but also on cultural practices and values (DeMaris and Longmore, 1996; Kornrich and Eger, 2016), so we expect to identify different patterns in the different countries studied.

Date and methods

Our study will explore countries that are part of the Generations & Gender Programme. Our sample consists of heterosexual couples, with or without children, of working age (16-64 years). We use the first wave of the second round of the 'Generations and Gender Survey' and select 11 countries (Germany, Austria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Finland, Czech Republic, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Argentina and Uruguay) that include information on the distribution of different domestic and care tasks and the associated satisfaction. The resulting sample consists of 49,507 respondents, of whom 20,389 are men and 29,118 are women.

The questions related to the distribution of domestic and care tasks ask who is responsible for carrying out a series of tasks in both areas. The answers to each can be 'always me', 'usually me', 'equally me and partner', 'usually partner', 'always partner' and 'someone else'. Regarding domestic tasks, the question is asked for those living with a partner, and refers to the following tasks: preparing meals, vacuuming, doing laundry, mall repairs, finances, and social. Childcare tasks are asked to those with minor children: Dressing, stay with ill children, playing with children, Homework, putting children to bed. In addition, the interviewees respond on a scale of 0 to 10, the satisfaction to housework and childcare, which is the dependent variable of this study.

For the analysis, we constructed a categorical variable for the division of housework tasks and another for care work, which are used as the main independent variables. Each of these variables comprises five categories: woman does more, man does more, division is equal, division is segregated (each partner undertakes different types of tasks), and tasks are performed by a third person.

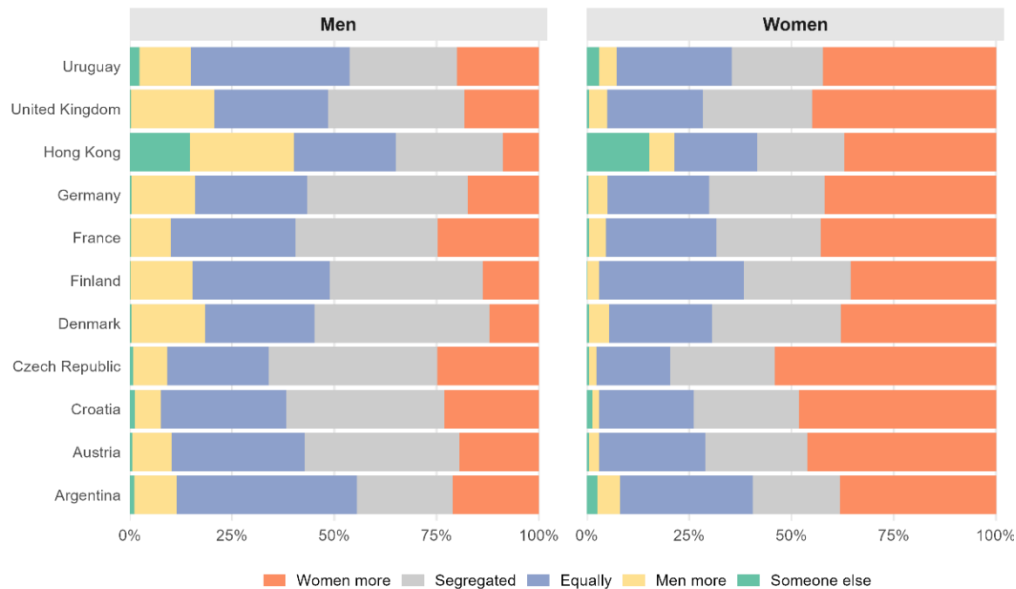
The control variables included in the study are age, type of union (married or cohabiting), and the presence of children, in the case of housework tasks since childcare's questions are already limited to parents. Finally, the independent variables also account for several socioeconomic characteristics, such as labour market participation and educational level.

Preliminary results

The first results show clear differences in the perception of the division of unpaid tasks between men and women, as well as between countries. Figure 1 illustrates the perception of the division of housework by country and gender. On the one hand, men tend to report a greater personal involvement: the categories "Men more", "Equal" and "Segregated" represent a higher share of their responses compared to women.

Women, by contrast, perceive themselves as much more involved than men declare. In all countries, the most representative perception is that women do more (around 50% report doing most of the housework), while they consider male involvement to be much more limited (only around 5% report that men do more).

Figure 1. perception of the division of housework by country and gender



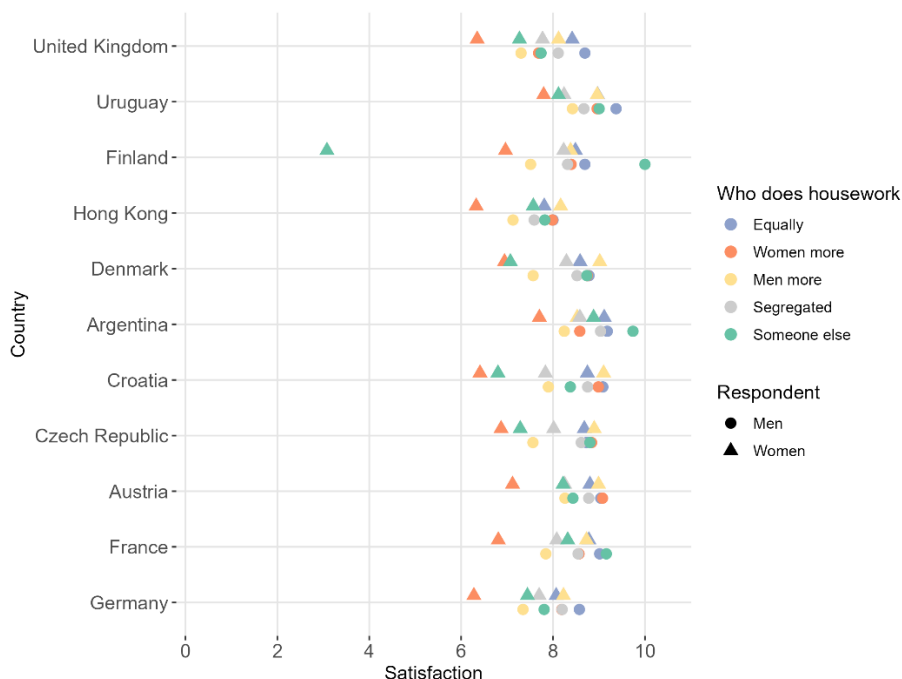
Source: Author's calculations using the Generations and Gender Survey

With regard to cross-country variation, women in France, Hong Kong, Denmark and Argentina report lower levels of personal involvement, which implies greater male participation (mainly within equal or segregated divisions, but rarely in men-only divisions). In these same countries, men also tend to perceive a higher degree of equality in the household division of labour. Hong Kong is a particular case with a high proportion of housework done by other and men even perceiving that they do more housework than women.

Satisfaction with the division of domestic labor varies according to both gender and the type of division. Figure 2 displays the average level of satisfaction with the distribution of housework for each type of category. Among men, except those who report doing more of the housework, show higher levels of satisfaction than women. Women, on the other hand, tend to be more satisfied when the division is equal or when men do more, but not when it is segregated. This latter result suggests that women are more likely to assume the less desirable household tasks when the division is segregated.

Considering both variables allows us to observe how satisfaction varies across genders and countries, while also considering that perceptions of the division of labour differ between men and women.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with housework distribution for each type of categories of division of domestic labour, by country and gender



Source: Author's calculations using the Generations and Gender Survey

Firsts Conclusions and next steps

As a preliminary conclusion, we can state that perceptions of fairness are closely associated with gender and cultural norms. Women tend to view unequal divisions of domestic labour as unfair, whereas men across all countries appear to normalise such inequalities. This is reflected in the relationship between the categories of domestic labour division and the levels of satisfaction associated with each typology. Moreover, the first figure illustrates that the perception of the domestic labour division varies substantially by gender: men believe they do more than they 'actually' do. This may also suggest that they are less aware of the full range of domestic demands involved in running a household, which could help explain why their subjective assessments (here measured through satisfaction) are skewed.

These results offer only an initial snapshot of the study. The next steps are, first, to replicate the analysis for care tasks. Second, to run separate OLS regressions for men and women, including the division of housework and the country as main explanatory variables and controls and socioeconomic variables, in order to explore the differences in the satisfaction when accounting for the other factors.

Taken together, this study will show how social reproduction operates as a mechanism that sustains gender inequalities.

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