

# Differences in Environmental Awareness and the Division of Domestic Tasks within Couples: An Analysis of Gender Inequalities

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## Introduction

This paper examines the links between ecological transition and gender inequality, focusing on how considering ecological transition in family life could exacerbate existing gender inequalities in the division of domestic tasks between partners. Adopting consumption practices that promote the ecological transition could increase the time spent on domestic chores, thereby exacerbating existing gender inequalities, particularly if women are more environmentally conscious than men, as suggested by the literature on these issues. These are the hypotheses that we test in the article. We use data from the the French Families and Employers longitudinal survey (INED, 2024), which allows us to analyze the factors influencing the importance placed on consuming “organic, local, or zero-waste” products, particularly in relation to gender, as well as the correlation between this “ecological awareness” and the time spent on domestic tasks. Secondly, the article examines differences in environmental awareness within couples to analyze the possible effects of homogamy / heterogamy in environmental awareness. Our aim is to explore the environmental awareness gap within couples according to gender (if there are differences in “environmental awareness,” which of the two partners, the man or the woman, attaches greater importance to these issues). We also consider a set of other characteristics of the couple particularly their income level, their family configuration, the duration of their relationship and the gap in their education. Finally, we analyze the links between the gap in environmental awareness within couples and the sharing of domestic chores. The FamEmp survey contains information on the different types of domestic tasks (cooking daily meals, cleaning, doing laundry, paying bills, organizing social life, planning the domestic tasks) and parental tasks, as well as on the overall time devoted to them and the sharing of domestic chores within couples living together permanently (for each task). We therefore examine the links between these gaps in “environmental awareness” within couples and the unequal gender distribution of domestic tasks, in terms of meal preparation and the organization of domestic life. Do couples who share a low or, conversely, a high level of environmental awareness tend to share domestic tasks differently than couples with heterogeneous levels of environmental awareness? How does this vary according to the gender of the two spouses?

## 1. Literature review

In the literature, environmental awareness is defined as a mental disposition in favor of the environment that may or may not result in the adoption of daily practices that support the ecological transition. Gender is one of the factors most often identified in the literature as having an effect on individuals' environmental awareness. Women tend to report higher levels of environmental awareness than men.

Taking the ecological transition into account can lead to changes in all areas of personal life, potentially increasing the time spent on domestic tasks (Gibson et al., 2013). For instance, incorporating ecological considerations into meal planning may result in practices such as buying

organic or locally sourced products (instead of having goods delivered from large retailers or purchasing ready-made meals), potentially increasing the time spent on shopping and meal preparation (Coulangeon et al., 2023). Women are more likely than their partners to be responsible for implementing these practices that support ecological transition on a daily basis (Organo et al., 2013; Coulangeon et al., 2023; Lindsay et al., 2023), which could exacerbate existing gender inequalities in the domestic sphere.

## 2. Data and methods

The data used in this article are from the Families and Employers longitudinal survey (FamEmp), which focuses on to work-life balance issues (Fontaine et al., 2025a). It is a linked individual-employer survey, with the first part targeting individuals aged 20-65 residing in mainland France, and the second part questioning establishments with 10 or more employees, which are the employers of the individuals surveyed. The survey is longitudinal, with at least three waves planned for 2024, 2027, and 2030. The data used in this communication are those from the first wave of the individual survey (FamEmp, INED, 2024). In 2024, 41,233 individuals were interviewed by telephone or online about their private and family life, their professional life, their spouse and children (if applicable), and their experience of the work-life balance (Fontaine et al., 2025b).

A question seeking to assess ecological awareness in the domestic sphere was asked of respondents about themselves and their spouses in the following terms and with the same response options:

- *Personally, do you think that consuming organic, local, or zero-waste products is... ? 1. Extremely important, 2. Very important, 3. Important, 4. Not very important*

- *And for your spouse?*

These questions are used in this article as a proxy for measuring environmental awareness. Although they have their limitations, their main advantage is that they provide information on both partners, enabling analysis of differences between them.

The survey also asks questions about the time spent on domestic tasks and how domestic and parental responsibilities are shared between the two partners.

## 3. Preliminary results

### 3.1. What are the levels and determinants of “environmental awareness”?

The variable on the importance attached to “consuming organic, local, or waste-free products,” which we consider here to be an approximation of the ecological awareness of respondents, offers four possible responses: ‘extremely important’, ‘very important’, ‘important’, and ‘not very important’. Around half of the surveyed population (49%) considers this to be ‘important’. Only a small minority (16.6%) say that it is ‘not very important’. At the other end of the spectrum, 24.1% of individuals consider it to be ‘very important’ and 10.3% ‘extremely important’.

We then explore the determinants of environmental awareness by analyzing the role of certain factors highlighted in the literature: all other characteristics being equal, women are more likely than men to say that they value “organic, local, or zero-waste” consumption (see Table A.1 in the Appendix).

## 3.2. The link between environmental awareness and the time spent on household chores

We tested the link between the environmental awareness and the amount of time spent on household chores each day (see Table A.2 in the Appendix). It appears that, people who say that consuming organic, local, or zero-waste products is extremely or very important are more likely to spend two or more hours on household chores per day, all other things being equal. This effect appears to be similar for both women and men. Therefore, higher levels of environmental awareness therefore seem to be linked with more time spent on household chores.

## 3.3. Environmental awareness and division of tasks within couples

### *3.3.1 Differences in environmental awareness within couples*

We observe that a vast majority of individuals say that organic, local, and waste-free consumption are equally important to them and their spouse. Therefore, approximately 80% of couples have identical levels of environmental awareness regarding consumption issues. Among the remaining couples (approximately 20%), women report higher levels of environmental awareness in three-quarters of cases (15%), while men do so in only a quarter (5%).

Table A.3 in the Appendix shows the factors linked to differences in environmental awareness among heterosexual couples. These appear to be linked to the education gap between spouses, income level, the length of the relationship, and the area of residence (with more convergent levels of environmental awareness between spouses in rural areas). Reported differences in environmental awareness within couples also appear to correlate with more general disagreements on other topics.

### *3.3.2 Links with the division of domestic tasks*

Secondly, we aim to establish whether disparities in environmental awareness among couples are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities in the distribution of domestic tasks between women and men. The sharing of domestic tasks remains unequal within couples, with variability depending on the type of task. In our field of study (heterosexual couples living together permanently), women always or most often take charge of meals in 55% of couples and always or more often plan domestic tasks in 52% of cases.

The results of the models seem to confirm our hypothesis that there is a risk of greater gender inequality in cases where there is a gap in environmental awareness between spouses. It appears that in couples where the woman is more environmentally conscious than the man, she is more likely to be responsible for daily meals (see Table A.4 in the Appendix). The only configuration in terms of environmental awareness where inequalities are reduced is in couples where both partners are extremely environmentally conscious.

The effect of differences in environmental awareness remains when it comes to predicting domestic tasks (Table A.5 in the Appendix). When women are more environmentally conscious than their partners, their mental load increases; however, when both partners are very or extremely environmentally conscious, inequalities in terms of mental load decrease.

Introducing a set of control variables alongside differences in environmental awareness does not alter this result, but provides other interesting insights (see Tables A.4 and A.5 in the Appendix). Therefore, all other things being equal, we can observe that the fact that women are more environmentally conscious increases the likelihood that they will be responsible for preparing meals and planning household chores most of the time, or even all of the time.

To check the robustness of this finding, two complementary models were tested for two other household tasks: vacuuming/sweeping and doing laundry. We would not expect differences in environmental awareness to have much effect on the sharing of these two tasks, which could be less related to environmental awareness (at least as measured in the FamEmp survey where the question on environmental awareness relates more to consumption). Regarding housework, there is no longer a significant effect of women being more environmentally conscious than their spouses when it comes to vacuuming or sweeping. However, when it comes to laundry, the effect remains, albeit only slightly significant.

## References

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## Appendices

Table A.1 Odds-ratios from the regression modelling considering whether consuming « organic, local, or waste-free » is extremely, very or important (vs. not very important)

	OR <sup>1</sup>	SE
<b>Gender</b>		
Man	—	—
Woman	1.30***	0.029
<b>Age</b>		
[20;29]	0.79***	0.048
[30;39]	0.90*	0.042
[40;49]	—	—
[50;59]	1.02	0.043
[60;65]	1.05	0.058
<b>Family situation</b>		
Single without children	—	—
Couple without children	1.04	0.042
Couple with children	0.97	0.039
Single with children	0.86*	0.061
Other, no answer	1.04	0.084
<b>Employment status</b>		
Employed	—	—
Unemployed	1.03	0.054
Inactive	1.02	0.039
Unknown	0.68***	0.075
<b>Education</b>		
No diploma	0.59***	0.048
CAP-BEP	0.65***	0.042
High school diploma	—	—
2-4 years of higher education	1.45***	0.041
5 years or more of higher education	2.31***	0.058
no answer	0.71***	0.092
<b>Income</b>		
D1	1.00	0.059
D2	0.93	0.060
D3	0.95	0.062
D4	1.04	0.064
D5	—	—
D6	1.05	0.067
D7	1.11	0.069
D8	1.25**	0.072
D9	1.35***	0.075
D10	1.33***	0.078
<b>Residential area</b>		
Rural	1.00	0.038
City <200 000 inhabitants	—	—
City >200 000 inhabitants	1.00	0.037
Paris metropolitan area	0.96	0.045
<b>Data collection mode</b>		
CAWI (Online)	—	—
CATI (Telephone)	1.29***	0.031

<sup>1</sup>\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Abbreviations: CI = Confidence Interval, OR = Odds Ratio, SE = Standard Error

**Source :** FamEmp, Ined, 2024

**Scope:** Women and men aged 20-65, mainland France, who agreed to answer the question on environmental awareness (N = 39,250)

**Reading note:** Given the same age, family situation, employment status, education level, standard of living, area of residence, and mode of data collection (online or telephone), women are more likely than men to say that consuming organic, local, or zero-waste products is extremely, very, or important (vs. not important).

Table A.2 - Odds-ratios from the regression modelling the likelihood of spending two or more hours a day on household chores

Characteristic	OR <sup>1</sup>	SE
<b>Gender</b>		
Man	—	—
Woman	1.94***	0.024
<b>Age</b>		
[20;29]	0.75***	0.039
[30;39]	1.03	0.033
[40;49]	—	—
[50;59]	0.91**	0.034
[60;65]	0.96	0.047
<b>Family situation</b>		
Single without children	—	—
Couple without children	1.14***	0.033
Couple with children	1.53***	0.031
Single with children	1.90***	0.049
Other, no answer	1.46***	0.071
<b>Employment status</b>		
Employed	—	—
Unemployed	1.38***	0.044
Inactive	1.36***	0.032
Unknown	1.46***	0.075
<b>Education</b>		
No diploma	1.17***	0.043
CAP-BEP	1.12**	0.036
High school diploma	—	—
2-4 years of higher education	0.86***	0.032
5 years or more of higher education	0.66***	0.040
no answer	1.16	0.088
<b>Income</b>		
D1	1.28***	0.049
D2	1.20***	0.050
D3	1.10	0.051
D4	1.01	0.052
D5	—	—
D6	1.16**	0.054
D7	0.95	0.055
D8	0.95	0.055
D9	0.96	0.056
D10	0.90	0.058
<b>Residential area</b>		
Rural	1.00	0.031
City <200 000 inhabitants	—	—
City >200 000 inhabitants	0.97	0.029
Paris metropolitan area	0.97	0.035
<b>Paid help for household chores</b>		
No	—	—
Yes	0.77***	0.049
No answer	0.72	0.204
<b>Data collection mode</b>		
CAWI (online)	—	—
CATI (Telephone)	0.43***	0.024
<b>Level of environmental awareness</b>		

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>OR<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>SE</b>
Not important	0.97	0.033
Important	—	—
Very important	1.06*	0.028
Extremely important	1.11**	0.038

<sup>1</sup>p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Abbreviations: CI = Confidence Interval, OR = Odds Ratio, SE = Standard Error

**Source :** FamEmp, Ined, 2024

**Scope:** Women and men aged 20-65, mainland France, who agreed to answer the question on environmental awareness (N = 39,250)

**Reading note :** Given the same age, gender, family situation, employment status, education level, standard of living, area of residence, and mode of data collection (online or telephone), people who say that consuming organic, local, or zero-waste products is extremely important (vs. important) are more likely to spend two or more hours a day on household chores.

Table A.3 Odds-ratios from the multinomial regression modelling the gap in environmental awareness between partners

Characteristic	Woman less environmentally conscious	Woman more environmentally conscious
	OR <sup>1</sup>	OR
<b>Education gap</b>		
Woman - Man = Woman	1,16*	0,84***
Woman +	0,75***	1,22***
<b>Gender of the respondent</b>		
Man	—	—
Woman	0,63***	1,79***
<b>Duration of the couple</b>		
<5	1,35**	1,17*
5-9	1,19	1,02
10-19	—	—
20-29	0,89	1,00
30+	0,62***	0,75***
No answer	1,09	0,74**
<b>Number of (step)children</b>		
No (step)children	—	—
1	1,08	0,96
2	1,12	1,01
3 +	1,13	0,93
<b>Income</b>		
D1	0,97	0,94
D2	0,64**	0,90
D3	0,92	0,98
D4	0,87	1,18
D5	—	—
D6	0,86	0,95
D7	0,89	1,07
D8	0,91	1,24*
D9	1,02	1,23*
D10	0,99	1,29**
<b>Residential area</b>		
Rural	0,72***	0,81***
City <200 000	0,95	0,94
City >200 000	—	—
Paris metropolitan area	0,97	1,10
<b>Disputes</b>		
Never	0,79**	0,91
Rarely	—	—
Sometimes	1,16*	1,32***
(Very) often	1,56***	1,63***
No answer	0,58*	0,88
<b>Domestic norms gap</b>		
Woman - Man = Woman	2,03***	1,80***
Woman +	1,63***	1,83***
<b>Working time gap</b>		
Man = Woman	—	—
Man +	0,98	1,05

	Woman less environmentally conscious	Woman more environmentally conscious
Characteristic	OR <sup>1</sup>	OR
Woman +	1,16	1,06
No answer	0,82	0,96
<b>Data collection mode</b>		
CAWI (Online)	—	—
CATI (Telephone)	1,38***	1,09*

**Source :** FamEmp, Ined, 2024

**Scope :** Heterosexual couples living together permanently and for whom we have a response to the question on environmental awareness for the respondent and his/her spouse (N = 22,495).

**Reading note:** the reference modality of the explained variable (multinomial logistic regression model) is the case where the respondent declared the same level of environmental awareness for themselves and their spouse. The left-hand shows the determinants of cases where the woman has less environmental awareness than her spouse, and the right-hand column shows the determinants of cases where the woman has greater environmental awareness than her spouse.

Table A.4 Odds-ratios from the regression modelling the likelihood that the woman always or most often prepare daily meals

Characteristic	OR <sup>1</sup>	ET
<b>Education gap</b>		
Woman -	—	—
Man = Woman	1,10**	0,036
Woman +	1,02	0,033
<b>Gender of the respondent</b>		
Man	—	—
Woman	1,43***	0,029
<b>Duration of the couple</b>		
<5	—	—
5-9	0,73***	0,056
10-19	0,91*	0,046
20-29	1,24***	0,041
30+	1,65***	0,050
No answer	0,99	0,068
<b>Number of (step)children</b>		
No (step)children	—	—
1	1,11*	0,039
2	1,11**	0,041
3 +	1,33***	0,053
<b>Income</b>		
D1	—	—
D2	1,09	0,065
D3	1,19**	0,065
D4	1,07	0,065
D5	1,01	0,066
D6	0,90	0,065
D7	0,92	0,065
D8	0,96	0,065
D9	1,02	0,065
D10	1,04	0,066
<b>Residential area</b>		
Rural	—	—
City <200 000	1,14***	0,040
City >200 000	1,04	0,036
Paris metropolitan area	1,11*	0,047
<b>Gap in environmental awareness</b>		
W=M +	—	—
W=M -	1,05	0,045
W=M ++	0,97	0,039
W=M +++	0,79***	0,053
W-	0,90	0,065
W+	1,34***	0,043
<b>Data collection mode</b>		
CAWI (Online)	—	—
CATI (Telephone)	0,86***	0,031
<b>Disputes</b>		
Never	—	—
Rarely	0,96	0,038
Sometimes	1,09*	0,035
(Very) often	1,19***	0,051
No answer	1,11	0,083

Characteristic	OR <sup>1</sup>	ET
<b>Domestic norms gap</b>		
Woman -	—	—
Man = Woman	1,04	0,046
Woman +	1,19***	0,032
<b>Working time gap</b>		
Man = Woman	—	—
Man +	1,44***	0,035
Woman +	0,60***	0,050
No answer	1,06	0,052
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	—	—
Civil union	0,74***	0,042
Common-law relationship	0,73***	0,040
No answer	0,67	0,258
<b>Gender values</b>		
Egalitarian	—	—
Inequalitarian	1,31***	0,034
<b>Wealth gap</b>		
W=M	—	—
M+	1,22***	0,039
W+	0,91*	0,046
No wealth	1,01	0,050
NR	1,05	0,051
<b>Paid help for household chores</b>		
No	—	—
Yes	0,89*	0,054
No answer	0,52*	0,257

<sup>1</sup>\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Abréviations: ET = écart-type, IC = intervalle de confiance, OR = rapport de cotes

**Source :** FamEmp, Ined, 2024

**Scope :** Heterosexual couples living together permanently and for whom we have a response to the question on environmental awareness for the respondent and his/her spouse (N = 22,495).

Table A.5 - Odds-ratios from the regression modelling the likelihood that the woman always or most often plan household chores.

Characteristic	OR <sup>1</sup>	ET
<b>Education gap</b>		
Woman -	—	—
Man = Woman	1,05	0,037
Woman +	1,09*	0,034
<b>Gender of the respondent</b>		
Man	—	—
Woman	2,19***	0,029
<b>Duration of the couple</b>		
<5	—	—
5-9	0,77***	0,057
10-19	0,88**	0,047
20-29	1,25***	0,042
30+	1,42***	0,051
No answer	0,98	0,071
<b>Number of (step)children</b>		
No (step)children	—	—
1	1,12**	0,040
2	1,30***	0,042
3 +	1,35***	0,054
<b>Income</b>		
D1	—	—
D2	0,95	0,066
D3	1,12	0,066
D4	0,98	0,067
D5	1,03	0,068
D6	1,10	0,067
D7	0,95	0,067
D8	1,07	0,067
D9	1,08	0,067
D10	1,21**	0,068
<b>Residential area</b>		
Rural	—	—
City <200 000	1,37***	0,041
City >200 000	1,13***	0,037
Paris metropolitan area	0,86**	0,048
<b>Gap in environmental awareness</b>		
W=M +	—	—
W=M -	1,06	0,046
W=M ++	0,89**	0,040
W=M +++	0,75***	0,055
W-	0,92	0,067
W+	1,37***	0,044
<b>Data collection mode</b>		
CAWI (Online)	—	—
CATI (Telephone)	0,80***	0,031
<b>Disputes</b>		
Never	—	—
Rarely	0,85***	0,039
Sometimes	1,21***	0,036
(Very) often	1,52***	0,053
No answer	1,05	0,084

Characteristic	OR <sup>1</sup>	ET
<b>Domestic norms gap</b>		
Woman -	—	—
Man = Woman	0,74***	0,047
Woman +	1,98***	0,033
<b>Working time gap</b>		
Man = Woman	—	—
Man +	1,36***	0,036
Woman +	0,78***	0,051
No answer	1,04	0,053
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	—	—
Civil union	1,04	0,044
Common-law relationship	0,98	0,042
No answer	0,85	0,274
<b>Gender values</b>		
Egalitarian	—	—
Inequalitarian	1,08*	0,034
<b>Wealth gap</b>		
W=M	—	—
M+	1,17***	0,040
W+	0,97	0,048
No wealth	0,79***	0,051
NR	0,81***	0,052
<b>Paid help for household chores</b>		
No	—	—
Yes	0,99	0,055
No answer	0,47*	0,292

<sup>1</sup>\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Abréviations: ET = écart-type, IC = intervalle de confiance, OR = rapport de cotes

**Source :** FamEmp, Ined, 2024

**Scope :** Heterosexual couples living together permanently and for whom we have a response to the question on environmental awareness for the respondent and his/her spouse (N = 22,495).