

## Persistent Gender Inequality and Use of Time in Spain

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Gender relations are essential for understanding the future of formation and breakup of couples and their fertility rates in the western world. Recent theoretical arguments postulate that transition to better gender symmetry should stimulate couple formation and fertility, giving as an example the recovery of fertility in some Scandinavian countries. In this context, the progressive increase in educational levels and presence of women in the workforce should encourage the transition. Nevertheless, several studies suggest that gender inequalities in the distribution of uses of time still persist, and tend to increase after children are born. In this number of *Perspectives Demogràfiques*, we offer a detailed examination of gender differences with regard to uses of time in Spain, doing so with attention to people's family situations and, where couples are concerned, the position of women by comparison with men in terms of educational level and contribution to household income.

Using data from the 2009-2010 Time Use Survey (Spanish National Statistics Institute – INE), we analyse the time spent on a daily basis by men and women in their routine activities at different stages of their life cycle. Notable among the main conclusions is the fact that inequality between men and women occurs in childhood, and the birth of children is the main factor widening the gap. Gender inequalities persist, although not with the same magnitude, even in cases where women have a higher educational level and larger income than their partners.

### PERSISTENT LIFELONG INEQUALITY

Although some convergence in time distribution of men and women has occurred in most western societies, the gender gap is still considerable (Kan *et al.*, 2011). When women take full-time paid jobs, this has not been balanced by men engaging in non-remunerated work and, it would seem, it is only recently that they have started taking responsibility for of this work, namely taking care of young children. This is demonstrated in several articles which, after studying different western countries, conclude that, with some variation, the differences in time distribution are observed throughout all stages of the life cycle (Anxo *et al.*, 2011). Along similar lines, our chief aim is to measure these differences in present-day Spain.

Starting out from data supplied by the 2009-2010 INE Time Use Survey, we look at different points in the life cycle. In order to this, according to their ages and family situations, we have assigned a moment in the cycle of life for each person and have calculated how much time is spent in a working day on four activities: paid work, domestic work, childcare, and leisure.

**FIGURE 1.** Average of hours spent on paid work, domestic work, childcare, and leisure in a working day: men and women at different stages in life



Source: Authors, using data from the Time Use Survey (INE, 2009-2010).



Evidently, the personal biography means that the stages people go through in their lifetime are not the same, and neither do they occur in the same order. With a view to simplifying matters, we have considered eight different stages which, by no means, include the whole range of situations: two as offspring living in a household with parents (one for the age range of 10-17 years, and the other for 18-29 years), one for young adults living alone (young people <35 years), four for people living with a partner (young childless couples, couples with one child, couples with two or more children, and elderly childless couples), and a last stage for elderly people living alone.

The distribution of men and women in the eight stages for the four activities analysed can be seen in Figure 1, which shows significant differences in the four activities over all eight stages. In a nutshell, men spend more time engaged in paid work and women in domestic work and childcare. We shall now look at the situation in more detail.

The difference between men and women begins in adolescence at the latest, when boys and girls are living with their parents. Although the amount of time devoted to domestic tasks at this age is not very significant, girls spend half an hour more every day helping in the house than boys do. While they are still living with their parents, the difference in time use between young men and women keeps rising slightly so that, between 18 and 29 years of age, the gap is 45 minutes. In both cases, this means that boys have more leisure time.

Once they are living independently—young adults living alone—males keep devoting less time to domestic tasks than women do. This is the only point in the life cycle where women spend more time engaged in paid work than men. Accordingly, there is a considerable difference in leisure time between women and men, as much as two hours in favour of males. Since these are young adults living alone, the difference observed in the time spent on domestic work has two possible explanations: different ways of doing housework (buying pre-cooked food and/or having lower cleaning standards) and/or resorting to external help (paying someone or getting help from the family) for some domestic tasks.

The difference continues when men and women start living together so that, among young childless couples, women spend one hour a day more on domestic tasks than men do. This difference can be explained in part—but only in part—by the fact that the male partner is more engaged in the job market since, when this difference for the employed population alone is

analysed, the results show that, even though the hour's difference is reduced, it is a long way from being eliminated.

However, the main gap in equality between men and women comes when children appear. Although part of the increased inequality can be explained by a generational question, different studies reveal that the most significant difference is not related with a change between generations which—although the new generations have more egalitarian ideals—has a traditionalising effect on behaviour when children appear (Abril *et al.*, 2015; Ajenjo and García, 2011). When couples have children, there is a drop in paid work among women who devote more time to housework and childcare. Roughly speaking, we could venture that women with one child spend 4.5 hours more per day on domestic tasks and childcare than their partners. If we think time in an adding and subtracting framework, and define *total work* time as the sum of paid work, domestic work, and childcare during the whole week –including Saturdays and Sundays-, we can say that, among couples with children, women with children work 5.5 hours more per week than men in the same situation.

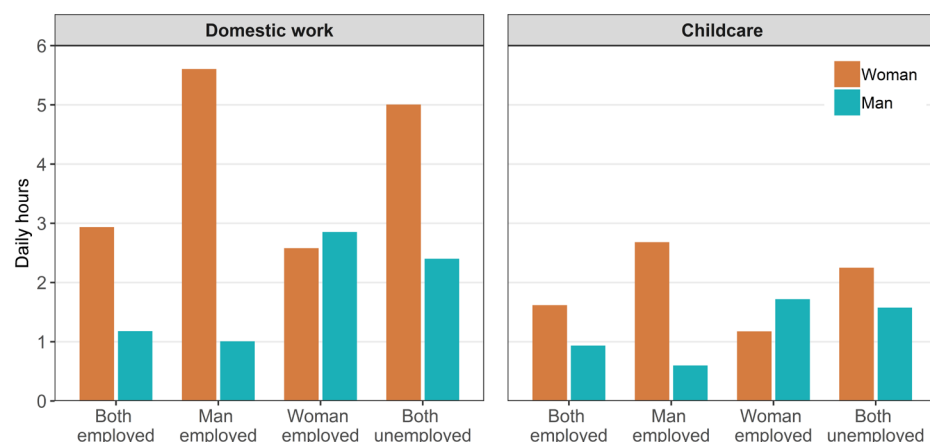
To some extent, the differences in time spent on domestic work extend into in what is known as the “*empty nest*” stage. And this occurs despite a substantial lessening of the differences observed with paid work, which implies a considerable difference in leisure time between men and women. Then again, despite the fact that these are very different generations, elderly people living alone show a pattern—though excluding remunerated work—that is similar to that for young adults who live alone.

## PERSISTENT INEQUALITY AMONG COUPLES WITH CHILDREN

It is the arrival of children, therefore, which correlates with a noticeable increase in gender differences with regard to use of time. But to what extent can the characteristics of the couple mitigate this increase? And what happens when the woman is better placed in the job market, or has a higher level of education, or is earning a larger income than her partner? In order to answer these questions, we shall now focus only on couples with young children in which the woman is aged between 20 and 49 years.

Figure 2 shows the time devoted to housework and childcare in relation with the employment of both members of the couple. With the exception of those couples where only the woman works (where men spend fifteen minutes more than women on domestic work and half an hour more on childcare), unpaid work is mainly done by women. Among couples where both partners are employed the

**FIGURE 2.** Distribution of domestic work and childcare by men and women according to employment of the couple. Couples with children where the woman is aged from 20-49 years



Source: Authors, using data from the Time Use Survey (INE, 2009-2010).

gender gap pertaining to domestic work can be calculated as one hour and fifty minutes and, for childcare, forty minutes. These two figures are considerably lower than they are among couples where only the man works. It should be borne in mind, however, that even if both members of the couple are employed this does not mean that their working hours are the same. In this regard, employed men spend on average some two hours more per day in the workplace than their partners do. To continue with the process of adding and subtracting, the difference resides in the fact that, over a week, among two-income couples with children, women spend almost five hours more on *total work* than men.

Although couples where only the woman is employed show a profile that is symmetrical with those where only the man works—in the sense that only one partner is employed—the situation of time devoted to domestic work is by no means reversed. Similarly, when both members of a couple are unemployed, a situation that could be comparable with that of two-income couples in terms of employment equality, the differences in time spent on domestic work rises by some 50 minutes, a figure very close to that for childcare.

## PERSISTENT INEQUALITY WHEN A WOMAN'S HUMAN CAPITAL IS GREATER THAN THAT OF HER PARTNER

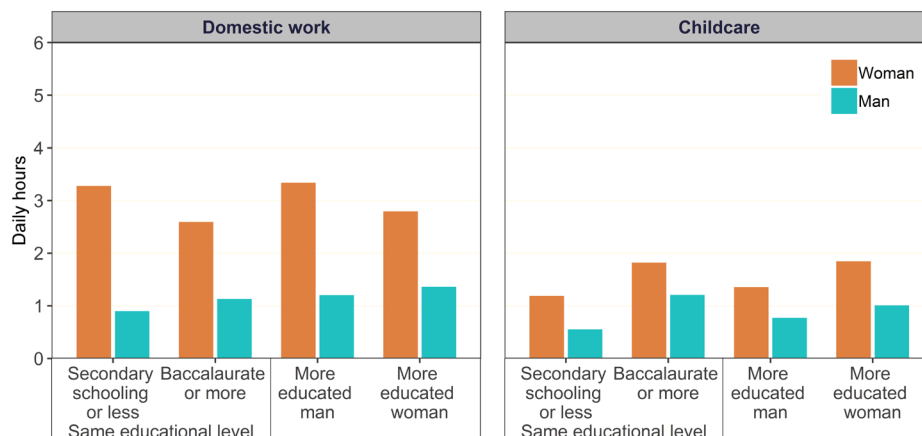
In recent decades there has been an improvement in the educational level of women, which is now higher than that for men. This means that there are increasing numbers of couples where a woman's educational level is higher than her partner's (Esteve *et al.* 2012). According to theories explaining the division of household roles, higher education of women, allowing for better jobs and bigger salaries, should mean improved negotiating power with regard to a better balance in sharing tasks. Figure 3 shows the distribution of unpaid work for dual-earner couples according

to educational level, a pattern that is repeated if income levels are represented.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the woman is chiefly responsible for domestic work and childcare, independently of her educational level. Nevertheless, when her educational level is higher than her partner's, the differences are reduced. In any case, the time gap remains at or above one hour and twenty-five minutes. This finding is very similar to results which appear when both partners have at least the European baccalaureate certificate.

The greatest differences, rising to two hours and twenty minutes, are observed in couples where both partners have secondary studies or less.

**FIGURE 3.** Distribution of domestic work and childcare by men and women according to educational level of the couple. Dual-earners couples with children where the woman is aged from 20-49 years



Source: Authors, using data from the Time Use Survey (INE, 2009-2010).

In this case, the time devoted by women to domestic work is similar to that for couples where the man has a higher educational level than the woman, although involvement of men in housework and childcare is more limited, as demonstrated by the fact that they spend some twenty minutes less on the former and fifteen minutes less on the latter.

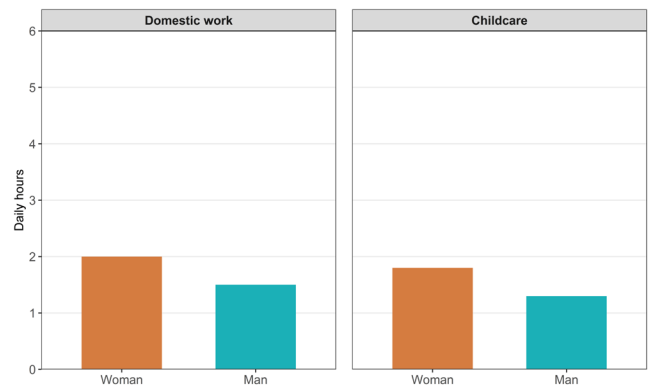
In general, a smaller gender gap is observed in childcare, and the time spent in this regard is conditioned more by the characteristics of the individual than by those of his partner. As recent studies have shown (Borràs *et al.*, 2018), increasing intensification of child rearing in recent years has been accompanied by a significant increase in time spent by men on childcare, although this has not entailed less time spent on this task by their partners.

But, what about two-income couples with small children and a higher level of equality? Do they manage to achieve absolute equality in terms of time spent on domestic tasks and childcare? With regard to the first question, it is necessary to specify, first, that the characteristics of the woman are much more important than those of her partner and, second, that with regard to essential features, we can say that these are couples where the woman has a university degree and an income greater than €2,000 per month. This condition is met by approximately 6% of two-income couples with children.

However, despite the significant reduction in differences, not even in this case is equality attained. As Figure 4 shows, in this group, and on a daily basis, women continue to spend half an hour more on domestic work and half an hour more on childcare than their partners. The main characteristic of this group is, however, that most couples have external domestic help, and this is the main way they manage to achieve less inequality. This domestic help compensates in great part for the housework which, in other couples, women are doing. As can be observed,

the fact is that, if this group is compared with those in Figure 3, the time spend by men is not very different from the time spent in other groups (just over an hour). It is the time spent by the woman that is substantially reduced.

**FIGURE 4.** Distribution of domestic work and childcare by men and women. Dual-earner couples with children where the woman has a university degree (or more) and earns more than €2,000 per month



Source: Authors, using data from the Time Use Survey (INE, 2009-2010).

## ARE WE ON THE WAY TO GREATER EQUALITY?

Improvements in equality regarding gender roles in a society like that of Spain with aspirations to being modern reach their limit in the micro-power relationship arising from the result of time use invested in reproductive work. Indeed, even the couples that are best situated in terms of their human capital are only able to come closer to equality by externalising domestic work. This solution reduces but does not eliminate differences within the couple. Rather, and this factor should not be overlooked, it means perpetuating the feminisation of domestic work.

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