

The division of household labor in Romanian families: between gender ideologies, relative resources and time availability

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Abstract.

Our intention is to determine which of the most used theoretical constructs (“gender ideology”, “relative resources”, and “time availability approach”) manages to better foresee the division of housework inside the family. To fulfill our intention we use the Romanian *Generations and Gender Survey* (GGS) from 2005. Specific to our analysis is the testing of different models on two distinct populations, at each step: men and women from the sample. The reasons are clear: the analyzed variables have a totally different distribution for the two populations and the control variables have, most often, inverse effects. Constructing different models for each gender will show that the effects of the same determinant are different on women and men. Our research shows that the attitudes toward housework do not have any significant effect on the division of housework. Most often, this happens in the case of women: they do most of the housework, no matter how egalitarian or traditional their vision of domestic roles is.

Introduction

Trying to explain the division of household labor, most research articles are using three distinctive “theories” (Coltrane, 2000): the first is “relative resources” and it states that a person with higher resources will do less housework. Other names by which this perspective is named are “exchange theory” (a sociological perspective, coming from Blood & Wolfe, 1960) or “bargaining theory” (the non-cooperative models of Lundberg & Pollak, 1994). The second theory is “gender ideology” (or “gender role socialization theory”, or “gender values” approach) and suggests that individuals have different ideology orientation and they are translating such values and norms in the daily activities. The third theory was named “time availability” constraints, suggesting that the individuals that are spending longer time in paid

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work will spend less time in unpaid work, and it can be seen as a simplification of Becker (1965) “altruism model”. Although the boundaries between theories have gone fuzzy lately, and current research articles are transgressing the “classical theories” (the gender construction theory of Fenstermaker Berk (1985) and South and Spitze (1994) or the economic and exchange theory of Brines (1994)) most of the researchers are testing these theories as competing perspectives (Bittman et al., 2003). We will follow a similar approach in this paper.

Theoretical considerations

Most of the researches in this area start from the assumption that individuals eschew housework, considering it a “disutility” (Brines, 1993). Various perspectives are used to explain why and how the process is taking place. The bargaining or the exchange theory proposes that the individual with higher resources is buying out his or her participation in the domestic task. Time availability assumed that the 24 hours a person has can only be divided in specific fashion, and the time for domestic is determined by the time spent in paid work, the later being a result of a negotiation between husband and wife or the result of a comparative labor market advantage. Gender ideology perspective assumes that individuals behave according to their value orientation on subjects like the housework or the gender roles, more generally. Across different cultures it is believed by authors that individuals with less traditional attitudes will struggle to create a more egalitarian distribution of housework, while individuals with traditional view on the subject will insist on a specialized and differentiated allocation of tasks.

The Romanian context

Housework refers to time, and time is definitely limited (there are only 24 hours a day), so we cannot study time for housework separately from the time for work, study, personal time (sleep, eating) or free time. How can we better analyze the way in which the time lived by the social subjects is structured, the way in which time use vary according to the lifestyle or different social conditions? The diary method, as opposed to the research based on questionnaire has a much better precision rate than the classical methods (stylized questions in questionnaires) and a reduced rate of non responses. Romania was part of the *Harmonized*

European Time Use Surveys (HETUS¹) and the results of the study across Europe shows that eastern-European countries and Romania, particularly, present greater gender inequalities when it comes to the total workload, or to the housework in particular (Hărăguș, 2005). This is not surprising, since the double-burden in Romanian families is a common situation that dates from the post-war period when “forced egalitarianism” meant high rates of women participation on the labor market but also full responsibility for the housework (Kligman, 1998).

Data and analysis

Our intention is to determine which of the theoretical constructs presented above manages to better foresee, on the one hand, the amount of housework done by an individual (hours spent for this activity), and on the other hand, the division of housework inside the family. To fulfill our intention we have used the data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS)², a study conducted on a national representative sample of 11986 persons. From the total respondents we have selected only those who form co-resident couples (marriage or cohabitation). Certain theoretical requirements made us to further reduce the sample, dropping out the situations when other adults than the couple were living in the same household and where the respondent or the partner had severe disabilities, thus, the final sample consisted of 4814 individuals (2276 women and 2538 men).

Dependent measure.

The main methodological problem of the GGS is that the research instrument was applied to only one person in the household, which makes the evaluation of housework division inside the family, by comparing the spouses’ answers, impossible. Because the respondents were not asked about the number of hours spent for domestic tasks, we used other measures available in the questionnaire: we created a score of relative involvement in the housework (a construct that capture the gender equity in the household). The question was: “Who does the household

1 In Romania, the research was conducted by the National Institute of Statistics on a sample of 17751 respondents during August-September 2000, fact that raises problems in connection with the intra-seasonal variations and in direct comparability with other nations.

2 The survey was conducted in 2005 by the National Institute of Statistics for MPIDR Rostock and UNFPA Romania.

tasks of (1) preparing daily meals (2) doing the dishes (3) shopping for food (4) vacuum-cleaning the house (5) doing small repairs in and around the house (6) paying bills and keeping financial records and (7) organizing joint social activities". Responses vary from (1) always the respondent, (2) usually the respondent, (3) the respondent and the partner, (4) usually the partner, (5) always the partner. Other responses (always or usually another persons living in the/or outside the household) were recoded as (3), after considering that they do not modify the inequality between men and women present in the household. Instead of calculating an inequality index from the seven questions, we took only the first four, corresponding to what is called "female-dominated mundane and routine housework" (Coltrane and Ishii-Kuntz, 1992): food preparation, washing the dishes, cleaning the house and shopping for food (the last one being more gender neutral than the rest), with values that range from 4 to 20. The interpretation of the index is simple: at smaller values the respondent is responsible for most of the tasks, and higher values means that the partner is the one responsible for most of the housework.

Independent measures.

Household characteristics controlled in the models are: residency of the household (urban or rural), the marital situation (married or cohabiting), the number of children (we constructed three separately variables: the number of children under 7 years, between 7 and 14, and over 14 years) and the log of total family income. Partnership duration was use instead of the age of the partners, as we consider that a larger period of time spent together increases the chances of specialization in the housework.

Time availability. The time at work in the labor market outside the home (numbers of hours per week) for the respondent and the partner, along with a dummy variable that recorded if both are employed (or self-employed) is used to assess the time constraints or other role constraints.

Resources. Education is recorded in the GGS for every household member, and it is coded using ISCED categories. We decided to follow the idea of Coverman (1985) and Presser (1994): although the presence of highly educated individuals has an effect on the distribution of housework we treated education as a resource, hypothesizing that those who have higher education will be more successful in eschewing housework. The age difference can be

interpreted in the same way, being one of the reasons it was used in the analysis. The measure of income distribution was proposed by Sørensen and McLanahan (1987) and then it became a favorite indicator used for testing the relative resource perspective. The measure is calculated using the following formula:

$$R = (\text{Respondent Income} - \text{Partner Income}) / (\text{Respondent Income} + \text{Partner Income}).$$

Values of this measure range from “-1” which means that the respondent is totally dependent (financially), “1” means that the respondent provide all the income and “0” means that the partners contribute equally to the total income.

Ideology: a gender role ideology scale was used to test the orientation of the respondent toward the traditionally ascribed role of women and men. It is considered that the traditional vision insists on the differences between man and wife, thus a selection of the available questions was used:

1. In a couple it is better for the man to be older than the women.
2. If a woman earns more than her partner, it is not good for the relationship.
3. On the whole, men make better political leaders than women.
4. A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother is working.
5. Children often suffer because their fathers concentrate too much on the work. (R)
6. When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to them than women.
7. When parents are in need, daughters should take more responsibilities than sons.

The 5 point scales ranges from 1 (total agreement) to 5 (total disagreement) and the reliability analysis shows that alpha Cronbach's is .576 for women and .566 for men. The scale was then summed so the resulting scale can be interpreted as a continuum from a traditional view to a non-traditional view on the gender roles.

Analysis strategy

Specific to our analysis is the testing of different models on two distinct populations, at each step: men and women from the sample. The reasons are clear: the analyzed variables have a totally different distribution for the two populations and the control variables have, sometime, inverse effects. Constructing different models for each gender we will see that, usually, the effects of the same determinant are different on women than on men, a situation noticed by

the researchers in the field (Cunningham, 2005, Greenstein, 1996).

We choose to run the analysis on four steps: in Model A we included only household characteristics; in Model B we added the “time availability” measures; in Model C “relative resource” indicators were inserted and in the final model, Model D to these variables we added the gender role ideology scale.

A constraint in the distribution of the missing data forced us to implement a Multiple Imputation analysis. When constructing the dependent variable, one particular question is problematic: “(4) vacuum-cleaning the house” has 14.1% missing cases (the answer “not applicable”). Unfortunately, the simple “deletion procedure” is not possible here, since we don’t have a missing-at-random situation: the response “not applicable” was recorded in 677 cases, of which 608 in rural area (27% of the responses in rural area fall into missing data category, e.g. the lack of vacuum-cleaner and not the absence of cleaning the house) and only 69 (2.7%) in urban area. In order to maximize the use of every available data and to minimize the bias of the missing data we used the Multiple Imputation (MI) procedure in SPSS version 17 to impute the data for all 884 missing cases. Though the bias resulting from missing data could not be completely accounted, MI provides a better way than listwise deletion, or means imputation (Acock, 2005, Allison, 2002). This technique replaces the missing values with imputed values using an iterative multivariable regression technique. The procedure is repeated on n times thus creating the same number of sets of data. Further statistical analysis is run on each data set, while the final results are combined in pooled estimates of the parameters. We used the MI technique to create five imputed data sets and the final pooled results are based on parameters estimates drawn from these sets. It is important to note here that the MI procedure in SPSS does not produce a final test statistic for the significance of the overall model. In the tables presented below we will use the “original data” (our cases with listwise deletion) and the “pooled data” (the result of the MI procedure).

Results

Table 1 provides means and standard deviations for the key analysis variables, in two groups: men and women, using the “original dataset”, thus being possible to compare the values for men and women in the sample. In the table 2, we can see just the means for the variables, using the results from MI procedure, the “pooled data”.

The gender differences are evident: men report lower involvement in “feminine” housework tasks, depicting the situation in a similar way with the women from the sample. Thus we are more comfortable with the data, since we believe that the egalitarian ideology doesn’t have large support in Romania, the reports of the husbands won’t be influenced by social desirability.

Also we can see that we have similar reports on residency, marital situation, the number of children, the total family income and slight differences on age differences and in partnership duration (this is because for older ages women are over represented). As expected, reports differ greatly when we look at resource variables, or at working hours and gender ideologies.

We will try to see the effect of the “gender ideology”, then the effect of the variables from the theoretical models of the “relative resources”, and the effects of “time availability approach”, both on the relative score of involvement in housework. Table 3 (men) and table 4 (women) provide the unstandardized OLS regression coefficients estimating the influence of every variable on the dependent measure.

Model A suggest that household characteristics are important in analyzing the allocation of housework. Living in an urban area constitutes a factor that creates a more egalitarian distribution of housework, and the same can be said about a higher family income. Although cohabitation tend to create more egalitarian settings, these does not hold true in Romania (cohabitation is a mix of post-modern behavior for the highly educated with the traditional “poverty couple”).

Model B constitutes the insertion of the time availability factors in the model: we can see that in the case of the male population, longer working hours tend to create greater inequality in the partnership, while the working hours of the partner can restore some of the inequality (the inverse is true for women).

Model C contains the relative resource variables, and the relative income distribution has a powerful effect, for both men and women: the higher their relative income, the lower the implication in housework. For the men subsample the introduction of relative resource variables means that the paid working hours of the partner loses its predictive capability: for creating a more equitable distribution it matters the income generated and not the actual quantity of paid work.

Model D shows that gender role orientation is significant only for men and not for women and has the effect of enhancing the equity of the housework distribution.

Tables 5 and 6 contains the similar results, but on the “complete dataset”, or the “pooled data”. The results are in the same direction as those discussed already, with several differences: in the case of women, income inequality has a smaller effect than in the original data. In the case of men, the effect of resource variables is more important: the paid working hours of the respondent show stronger estimates, while the paid working hours of the partner has a significant effect even after controlling for the income distribution.

Discussion

First, we noticed that the gender ideology can not satisfactory explain the allocation of housework. Many times, the attitudes toward housework or the ideological orientation of family members do not have any significant effect on the behavior. Most often, this happens in the case of wives: they do most of the housework, no matter how egalitarian or traditional their vision of domestic roles is. But adherence to egalitarian norms has a significant effect for men, in the direction of turning the allocation toward a more equitable situation.

“Relative resources perspective” comes to fill in the aspects remained unexplained by the gender ideology approach. But the key variable in explanation (the measure of economic dependency) has a smaller effect for women than for men. This is a theoretical issue that needs further clarification: why when we move from the liberal regimes towards the conservative, social-democrat or (as it is the case here) eastern-European countries, this approach do not have the same explanatory power. Previous research (Hărăguș, 2007) has shown that this approach has explanatory power when we speak about the relative involvement in housework, but it does not succeed to explain the absolute amount of housework.

Our research shows that the “time availability” approach has explanatory power for both men and women, but more powerful for women, which suggest that women are able to use the greater amount of hours of paid work to decrease the involvement in domestic tasks.

The theories that insist on the importance of gender values are not very successfully in explaining the situation of Romanian families: the fact that the ideology has a significant

effect only in the case of men rather shows that “gender” transcends the field of explicit values assumed by the individual and that the “norm” in Romanian families is “housework is woman’s duty”. Interpretation of this situation can start from the relative resources perspective: housework is negotiated in the family by the one with more resources, so a bigger contribution to family budget has a greater importance, no matter who that person is. But we believe that the assumption of this theory, the gender neutrality, is not quite exact: in the default stage, the allocation of housework does not correspond to egalitarian norms, but to traditional family norms, strongly unequal and specific to rural areas, beyond the aspects of individual values. We think that the “relative resources” starts from some false assumptions when it declares itself “gender neutral”, because the “bargaining” (implicit, not explicit) does not take place in a balanced situation. The social normative governs the social space that gravitates around the issue of housework, fact well expressed by Nock (2001), who state that the main role of man is that of provider, and this role is not a social option, while his intervention in housework is. In other words, any bargaining starts from a profoundly unequal situation, and if this bargaining fails, the solution is given also by the social normative. Therefore, the “relative resources” can not satisfactory explain the allocation of housework without referring to the theory of gender construction. When the husband has egalitarian gender values, the situation can be more balanced, but when these are missing and the resources are equivalent, the allocation of childcare remains unequal.

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Table 1. Descriptives for the variables in analysis (Original data)

	Men (N=2051)		Women (N=1879)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Housework inequality ('feminine' tasks)	15,39	2,63	8,15	2,51
Urban residency	,60	,49	,60	,49
Married	,94	,23	,95	,23
partnership duration (in years)	24,98	16,14	25,78	16,27
Number of children 0-7 years old.	,27	,56	,28	,58
Number of children 8-13 years old.	,26	,53	,25	,54
Number of children 14-17 years old.	,04	,20	,03	,18
Log of total family income	6,6	,72	6,58	,74
Both employed	,32	,47	,33	,471
Paid working hours, respondent	25,40	22,58	18,07	20,75
Paid working hours, partner	17,40	20,62	24,23	22,36
Income inequality	,34	,47	-,30	,46
Respondent has lower education than the partner	,11	,30	,30	,460
Respondent has higher education than the partner	,31	,46	,10	,300
Age difference (R- P)	3,24	4,49	-3,49	4,22
Gender Ideology (traditionalism - non-traditionalism)	20,37	3,662	21,14	3,710

Table 2. Descriptives for the variables in analysis (Pooled data – Multiple Imputation)

	Men (N=2538)	Women (N=2276)
	Mean	Mean
Housework inequality ('feminine' tasks)	15,47	8,11
Urban residency	0,53	0,53
Married	0,94	0,95
partnership duration (in years)	25,81	26,61
Number of children 0-7 years old.	0,27	0,28
Number of children 8-13 years old.	0,25	0,25
Number of children 14-17 years old.	0,04	0,03
Log of total family income	6,50	6,51
Both employed	0,30	0,31
Paid working hours, respondent	24,78	17,57
Paid working hours, partner	16,66	23,67
Income inequality	0,36	-0,31
Respondent has lower education than the partner	0,10	0,30
Respondent has higher education than the partner	0,31	0,10
Age difference (R- P)	3,29	-3,51
Gender Ideology (traditionalism - non-traditionalism)	20,33	21,06

Table 3. Unstandardized coefficients of regression, men, (Original Data, N=2051)

	MODEL A		MODEL B		MODEL C		MODEL D	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Intercept	18,564**	,606	17,963**	,615	17,487**	,636	18,431**	,695
Urban residency	-,954**	,128	-,886**	,128	-,834**	,129	-,816**	,129
Married	,201	,261	,223	,261	,236	,261	,270	,261
partnership duration (in years)	-,006	,005	-,006	,006	-,005	,006	-,005	,006
Number of children 0-7 years old.	,184	,118	,101	,119	,086	,118	,084	,118
Number of children 8-13 years old.	,248*	,114	,206	,114	,181	,114	,161	,114
Number of children 14-17 years old.	,292	,290	,334	,290	,336	,289	,355	,289
Log of total family income	-,418**	,089	-,339**	,096	-,297**	,096	-,289**	,096
Both employed	-	-	-,177	,207	-,209	,207	-,204	,207
Paid working hours, respondent	-	-	,014**	,004	,009*	,004	,009*	,004
Paid working hours, partner	-	-	-,015**	,004	-,007	,005	-,007	,005
Income inequality	-	-	-	-	,557**	,154	,546**	,154
Respondent has lower education than the partner	-	-	-	-	,061	,187	,078	,187
Respondent has higher education than the partner	-	-	-	-	-,022	,128	-,004	,128
Age difference (R- P)	-	-	-	-	-,010	,013	-,013	,013
Gender Ideology (traditionalism - non-traditionalism)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-,051**	,015

Note: ** p< .01, * p<.05

Table 4. Unstandardized coefficients of regression, women, (Original Data, N=1879)

	MODEL A		MODEL B		MODEL C		MODEL D	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Intercept	3,652**	,594	4,083**	,591	4,464**	,599	4,032**	,667
Urban residency	1,078**	,126	1,015**	,125	,955**	,126	,947**	,126
Married	,262	,256	,228	,254	,231	,254	,225	,254
partnership duration (in years)	-,003	,005	-,007	,006	-,007	,006	-,007	,006
Number of children 0-7 years old.	-,169	,113	,006	,115	-,003	,115	,002	,115
Number of children 8-13 years old.	,055	,110	,109	,109	,122	,109	,123	,109
Number of children 14-17 years old.	-,116	,304	-,010	,301	-,009	,301	-,007	,300
Log of total family income	,567**	,086	,544**	,090	,533**	,090	,529**	,090
Both employed	-	-	,510*	,204	,497*	,204	,490*	,204
Paid working hours, respondent	-	-	,012**	,004	,006	,005	,006	,005
Paid working hours, partner	-	-	-,023**	,004	-,019**	,004	-,019**	,004
Income inequality	-	-	-	-	,400**	,151	,386*	,151
Respondent has lower education than the partner	-	-	-	-	-,158	,124	-,162	,124
Respondent has higher education than the partner	-	-	-	-	-,270	,185	-,281	,185
Age difference (R- P)	-	-	-	-	,016	,013	,016	,013
Gender Ideology (traditionalism - non-traditionalism)	-	-	-	-	-	-	,022	,015

Note: ** p< .01, * p<.05

Table 5. Unstandardized coefficients of regression, men, (Pooled Data, N=2538)

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Intercept	18,739**	,530	18,197**	,537	17,604**	,562	18,669**	,621
Urban residency	-,883**	,117	-,818**	,118	-,759**	,118	-,740**	,118
Married	,008	,228	,038	,229	,037	,229	,077	,228
partnership duration (in years)	-,008	,004	-,007	,005	-,006	,005	-,006	,005
Number of children 0-7 years old.	,173	,102	,105	,103	,093	,102	,084	,102
Number of children 8-13 years old.	,156	,102	,111	,101	,092	,101	,072	,101
Number of children 14-17 years old.	,368	,257	,397	,255	,404	,255	,413	,254
Log of total family income	-,416**	,080	-,349**	,085	-,297**	,086	-,290**	,086
Both employed	-	-	-,092	,185	-,123	,185	-,116	,184
Paid working hours, respondent	-	-	,015**	,003	,010**	,003	,011**	,003
Paid working hours, partner	-	-	-,017**	,004	-,010*	,004	-,010*	,004
Income inequality	-	-	-	-	,558**	,136	,541**	,135
Respondent has lower education than the partner	-	-	-	-	,089	,172	,106	,171
Respondent has higher education than the partner	-	-	-	-	,020	,115	,043	,115
Age difference (R- P)	-	-	-	-	-,004	,011	-,007	,011
Gender Ideology (traditionalism - non-traditionalism)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-,057**	,014

Note: ** p< .01, * p<.05

Table 6. Unstandardized coefficients of regression, women, (Pooled Data, N=2276)

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Intercept	4,639**	,536	4,994**	,535	5,362**	,545	4,922**	,608
Urban residency	,961**	,116	,925**	,116	,867**	,117	,858**	,117
Married	,235	,234	,178	,234	,186	,234	,177	,234
partnership duration (in years)	-,004	,004	-,004	,005	-,004	,005	-,004	,005
Number of children 0-7 years old.	-,159	,104	-,019	,105	-,024	,105	-,017	,105
Number of children 8-13 years old.	-,013	,102	,002	,101	,021	,101	,025	,101
Number of children 14-17 years old.	-,044	,276	-,022	,273	-,012	,273	-,007	,273
Log of total family income	,444**	,079	,401**	,082	,391**	,083	,387**	,083
Both employed	-	-	,416*	,186	,408*	,186	,402*	,186
Paid working hours, respondent	-	-	,011**	,004	,007	,004	,007	,004
Paid working hours, partner	-	-	-,016**	,003	-,014**	,004	-,014**	,004
Income inequality	-	-	-	-	,336*	,133	,320*	,133
Respondent has lower education than the partner	-	-	-	-	-,161	,114	-,166	,114
Respondent has higher education than the partner	-	-	-	-	-,227	,169	-,234	,169
Age difference (R- P)	-	-	-	-	,019	,012	,018	,012
Gender Ideology (traditionalism - non-traditionalism)	-	-	-	-	-	-	,022	,014

Note: ** p< .01, * p<.05