

Sharing care obligations in ageing populations

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Extended abstract

Introduction

Better reconciliation of work and family life is increasingly recognised as supportive to objectives of the European Strategy for Growth and Employment in relevant European Commission (EC) documents. In addition to stimulating employment growth, two other important dimensions of the reconciliation policies are clearly acknowledged at European level: their impact on demographic renewal in Europe and on the work-private life balance (EC, 2007). An increase in the labour force in the short term and demographic renewal in the longer term are among five strategic policy goals outlined by the European Union (EU) to counteract the negative consequences of population ageing and the parallel shrinking of the working age population (e.g. Burniaux et al. 2004; Vignon, 2005; EC 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a). Moreover, balancing competing demands of work and family life under growing individual aspirations and expectations makes reconciliation an important component of life satisfaction and quality of life.

Increasing labour force participation of women along with population ageing influences not only the social division of labour between families and society but also the division of labour within the family between paid work and care, or to be more specific, the distribution of responsibilities between couples (Saraceno, 2008; Lewis, 2009). The family level arrangements seem to be underrepresented in the policy debates. Our analysis aims to contribute to these debates by providing information how domestic responsibilities are distributed among working men and women in the European countries. Especially, we are interested in sharing care duties for both children and the elderly. The paper is based on selected results of the study on “Family Life and Work” performed for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

Data and Methods

The data used for the study come from the Second European Quality of Life Survey 2007 conducted in 31 countries. The overall sample size was over 35 000. Sharing domestic chores between women and men, and especially sharing care responsibilities, is studied in objective and subjective terms. Objective measures (the mean time spent on activities defined, the frequency of doing particular activities) are supplemented by a subjective indicator based on an assessment of fairness of time allocation to household work by men and women. The way people organise their household duties is influenced not only by micro level determinants (individual and household characteristics) but also by macro level factors (institutional settings, labour market structures, wage structures, gender norms). These interrelationships are explored by use of a linear regression model.

To account for structural and institutional settings (family policy, labour market structures) and gender norms, which are perceived to be more or less supportive for reconciliation of work and family we use country classification developed by Matysiak (2008). Countries were classified according to four dimensions: institutional (family policies), cultural (gender norms), structural (labour market structures), economic (living standards) based on the conditions to reconcile work and family. The six country groups representing reconciliation regimes presented in decreasing reconciliation conditions order are: (1) Nordic countries, (2) Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg (3) Anglo-Saxon countries; (4) German-

speaking countries; (5) Southern Europe; (6) Central and East European countries; (7) Bulgaria and Romania.

Selected results

Household chores and childcare duties tend to be gender-segregated in every country. Country specific results show that female participation does not differ that much between countries whereas the involvement of fathers shows a larger variance. This result is confirmed by both the indicator of the frequency of tasks, measured by the percentage of working men and women involved in daily activities (care or housework or both) and the synthetic indicator of quantity of time.

On average, four women out of five are involved daily in unpaid household work against only 45% of men. The gender gap in daily involvement in household duties is mainly determined by the extent to which men are involved - the percentage of women's involvement varies between 60% and about 90% while that of men ranges from 18% to nearly 70%. The countries with the lowest gender gap are Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Finland (more than 60% of men do unpaid work at home every day), followed by Latvia, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Estonia. The total time spent weekly on household tasks (the sum of time spent on care, cooking and other housework) further supports the gender-biased domestic workload.

That objective picture of gender inequality in doing housework may be compared with people's own perceptions about the appropriate sharing of domestic tasks. In fact, many men confirm that at home they do less than their fair share (this evaluation ranges from 22% in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to 73% in France). Conversely, the percentage of women who declare they do more than their fair share ranges from 15% in Finland to 71% in Luxemburg. There is a relatively high coherence across countries in this regard, which points to a realistic assessment of the unequal sharing of domestic tasks despite the fact that these opinions are influenced, *inter alia*, by cultural factors and people's aspirations about time division in the household.

Caring for and educating children constitutes a main part of time spent weekly on domestic work. The highest gender gaps in the mean time devoted to this activity are observed in the CC3 while the lowest gaps are found in the NMS12. This latter finding is the outcome of a higher incidence of full-time employment by women in the former socialist countries rather than being the result of more male involvement in care. In both the new and the old Member States men spend on average 18 hours each week on caring for and educating children while men in the CC3 only spend an average of 11 hours. Demand for time allocated to children varies remarkably among successive stages of the life course which are depicted by the age intervals.

On average, people spend much less time caring for elderly and looking after disabled relatives than on care for and education of children or cooking and doing household work. Again, it is mostly a women's activity but the gender gap is smaller than for the other two domestic activities. In the EU27, women on average spend 11 hours per week caring for elderly and disabled relatives against 8 hours spent on average by men. Elderly care involvement increases with age, mostly in terms of the frequency of care. However, respondents from the NMS12 report more caring time than those from the EU15, where ageing is more advanced. This finding signals that in the NMS12 more caring responsibilities are taken over by the family, due not only to cultural norms and legal regulations but also to shortages in public care.

Cooking and housework consumes on average 16 hours per week of women's time and eight hours of men's time in the EU27. Time patterns by age do not differ considerably. Respondents aged 18-34 show a smaller gender gap than those aged 35-49 and 50-64 who spend on average more time on these activities.

Finally, linear regression models were estimated to explore how the weekly time allocated to unpaid work is determined by micro- (individual-and household specific variables) and macro-level (reconciliation regimes) determinants. Initially, models for the time spent on care (separate models for children and elderly) and the total time spent on domestic work were performed separately for men and women. The

main comments below refer to five models (without the model of elderly care for men since its explanatory features are poor).

The presence of young children (under 13 years of age) strongly affects both weekly time spent on caring for children and time spent on domestic work. However, its impact varies for gender. Women with children spend nearly 20 hours more on care than women living in households without young children. The former allocate 17 hours more to domestic work than the latter. Children's effect on men is remarkably smaller, with fathers investing 11.5 hours more in care than those living in households without children while their weekly time allocated in domestic work is 10 hours higher.

Age intervals - used as a proxy for life course stages - confirm our previous findings: the highest load of domestic work and caring for children is attributed to women aged 25-34 and 35-49 (and more for the latter than for the former). The time spent on caring for children and domestic work by women aged 65 or more is more than 12 hours lower than it is for those aged 35-49 whereas for men the decrease is four hours in time spent on caring for children and five hours in time for devoted to domestic work. Furthermore, women aged 35-49 devote nearly one hour more time to care for the elderly than those aged 65 and over, just like women aged 50-64.

Living in the extended household might reduce the domestic workload of respondents but it might also create a demand for care. To make a distinction between these two situations two variables have been proposed:

- the 'family support' variable defined as a presence of persons aged 18-69 in the extended household which refers to internal resources of care;
- a demand for elderly care is reflected by the presence of persons aged 70 and over.

Both variables show significant impacts on time spent on relevant activities. People aged 18-69, who are members of the extended household spend substantially less time on household chores (for women 5.5 hours less of childcare and 7.5 hours less of domestic work overall against three hours and four hours respectively for men). If people aged 70 and over are household members the burden of domestic work is in fact higher. Time spent on domestic duties increases by over 10 hours for women and by four hours for men against time allocated to domestic work in households without these household members. Also time allocated to elderly care by women increases by nearly 9 hours.

Employment of the respondent reduces time allocated to care by women and time spent on domestic work by both men and women. The employment status has no influence on men's involvement in caring for and educating children as they devote on average the same amount of time regardless of being employed, inactive or unemployed.

Social contact and material transfer variables, included in the elderly care model, increase time allocated to care by women – those who contact their family members frequently devote more time to care than women with rare or no contacts. Also care time of women living in households which provide material transfers is higher than that of women whose household does not participate in material transfers.

The reconciliation regime classification variable, which refers to conditions of reconciliation of work and family, reveals interesting cluster patterns for women for both types of care and domestic chores. Compared to countries in Southern Europe, women in German speaking and Central European countries spend more time on caring for and educating children (around one hour more) whereas women in Benelux-France and Anglo-Saxon countries spend less than Southern countries (nearly one hour less). The CC3 countries diverge strongly from other countries with time devoted to children by women from being almost four hours lower. The amount of time allocated to children by women in Bulgaria and Romania does not differ significantly from that of Southern countries. Notably, the pattern in the Nordic countries is also similar. This means that similar time is allocated to rearing children in countries which suffer from a lack of institutional care as it is the case in countries where these services are well developed. It can be

speculated that in Southern countries time spent on child care seems to be a matter of necessity while in Nordic countries a matter of choice.

Except for the Anglo-Saxon cluster, women in all groups of countries allocate less time than women in Southern Europe to caring for the elderly. In the NMS12 and candidate countries it seems to be due to lower life expectancy levels and less advanced population ageing so far while in the remaining EU15 countries it seems to be caused by better provisions of care services (public, private).

Similarly, the diversity between reconciliation regimes is well pronounced with regard to women's engagement in domestic chores. Southern, German speaking and CEE countries do not differ in time devoted to home work whereas other country groups show significantly lower levels (by at least two hours).

If patterns of time invested in child care by men are less sensitive to the typology applied, this is not the case when it comes to involvement of men in domestic work. Except for the CC3 countries, where men spend nearly five hour less on domestic chores, men from all country clusters allocate more time in household work than men in Southern countries (from two hours more in German speaking countries to over four hours in Anglo-Saxon countries).

Conclusion

Our findings show that care consumes the majority of time allocated to household activities. Its patterns by age differ: time devoted to children declines with age while time spent on caring for the elderly increases. Age does not differentiate significantly when it comes to time for cooking and housework. In addition, that activity takes much less time from unpaid work time than care does. Therefore, the total time of unpaid work by age is mainly determined by care patterns. The total care time of Europeans aged 18-34 and 35-49 is higher than that of those aged 50-64. Taking into account an asymmetric divide of care by gender in both indicators of the care involvement - time and frequency of care,- one can conclude that employed mothers - especially those at age 35-49 - take a disproportional share of work. Shifting that workload, between both ages and gender, seems to be a crucial factor for work-family life balance.

Gender gaps in time spent on domestic tasks and their frequency are strongly diversified across countries, caused mainly by a large variation in the figures for men. Subjective opinions about fairness of sharing household duties of men and women are generally consistent with an evaluation based on objective indicators. Moreover, there is a strong correlation across countries between men's and women's opinions. Men acknowledge firmly that they do less than their fair share at home while women state they contribute more than their fair share of household work. Hence, there is at least a common notion (perception) about gender inequalities of labour division in the home.

The typology of reconciliation regimes explain well cross-country differences in women's engagement in domestic chores and care. Patterns of time invested in child care by men are less sensitive to the typology applied while differences in men's involvement in domestic work are well pronounced across country clusters. Men from all country clusters allocate more time in household work than men in Southern countries - from two hours more in German speaking countries to over four hours in Anglo-Saxon countries.

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