

Housework and Parenthood: What a difference a child makes

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Overview

Recent research has shown signs of a recovery in union stability (Raley and Bumpass, 2003) and fertility in Europe (Myrskala et al, 2009). It has been suggested that this recovery is led by couples that have adopted gender equality within their relationship and are able to maintain it after the transition to parenthood (Esping-Andersen and Billari, 2015). In this paper we examine the extent to which the distribution of housework changes in a couple with the arrival of a first child and the degree to which this is in turn associated with relationship satisfaction and the couples intentions to have more children.

We set out to test the hypothesis that the genderization of household tasks upon the entry into parenthood leads to increased relationship instability and lower fertility intentions. This hypothesis is drawn primarily from gender equity theory interpretations of recent demographic developments in Europe which indicate that there has been a degree of fertility recovery in some segments of European societies but most notably amongst those groups which display a high degree of gender equity. However there remains a lack of clarity over precisely what elements of gender equity are driving these developments (Neyer, Lappegård and Vignoli, 2013). There is particular difficulty in establishing whether it is macro or micro manifestations of gender equity or a combination of the two (McDonald, 2000). To examine this question it is therefore necessary to consider relationship dynamics within a variety of national contexts so as to establish whether the findings hold across various social contexts or whether it is indeed context sensitive.

The primary advantage of the analysis offered here however is the longitudinal operationalisation of gender equity at the household level over the transition to parenthood. Such a dynamic measurement of the distribution of household tasks allow for a more nuanced understanding of the genderizing effects of parenthood and the implications for the wider relationship. The analysis therefore provides a clear and meaningful test of the emergent theories of gender equity emanating from European research.

Data & Methods

By using data from two waves of data for 6 countries in the Generations and Gender Programme (Austria, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Hungary) we are able to observe a couples distribution of housework before and after they have their first child. We measure the couple's distribution at wave 1, before they have had their first child. We do so by creating a scale indicating the degree to which the male helps with household tasks. This is done by examining responses to question on 5 household tasks. If the male always does the task he is given a score of 2, if he does it more regularly than his spouse he is given a 1, if they do it an equal amount he is given a 0, if he does it less often than his spouse he is given a -1 and finally if he never does it then he is given a -2. The scores are then added up to produce a score between -

20 and 20. We then calculate a similar scale at wave 2 three years later, again ranging from -20 to 20 but this time incorporating child care tasks within the calculation of the distribution. The difference between the two scales is then used as an indicator for the degree to which household tasks are genderized by the birth of a couple's first child. This forms our main independent variable and we use it to predict relationship satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10 and multinomial logistic regression reflecting future fertility intentions. A number of controls are used including age, education level and employments status of both the man and the wife.

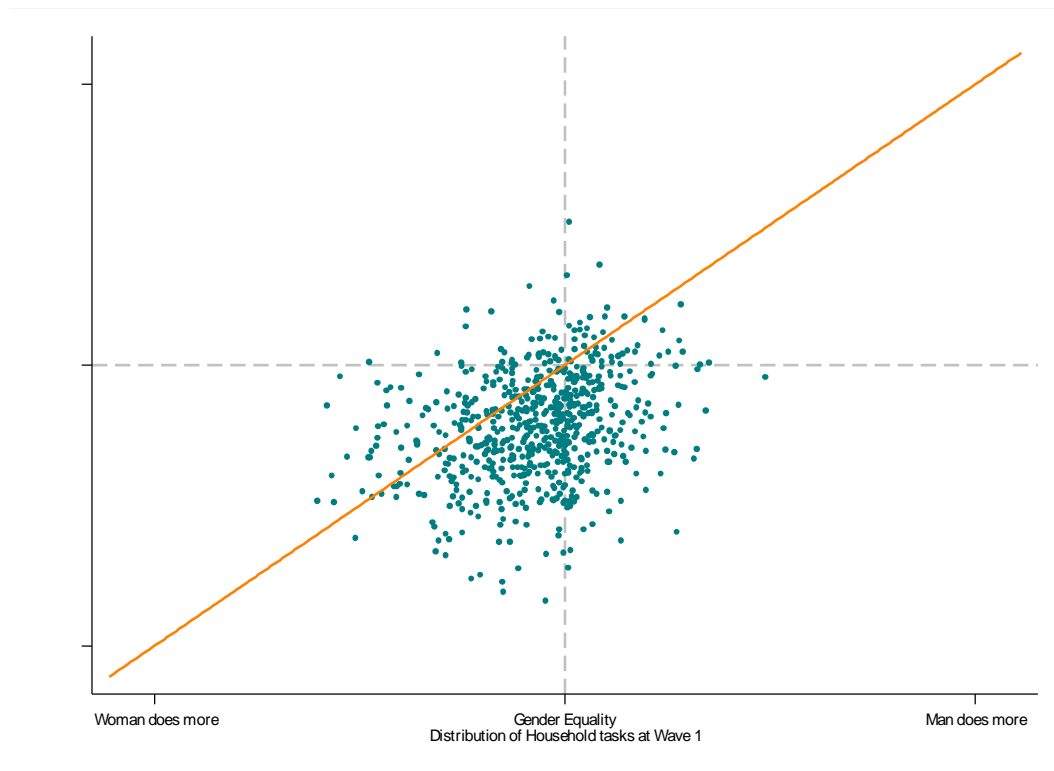


Figure 1 - The distribution of Household tasks before and after the entry into parenthood

Figure 1 shows the distribution of household tasks at wave 1 and then at wave 2, after the couple have become parents. It shows the clear genderization of the household work as the majority of observations are below the orange line which marks parity. Figure 2 below then shows the distribution of the difference variable which is used in the rest of the analysis as an indicator of genderization of household tasks.

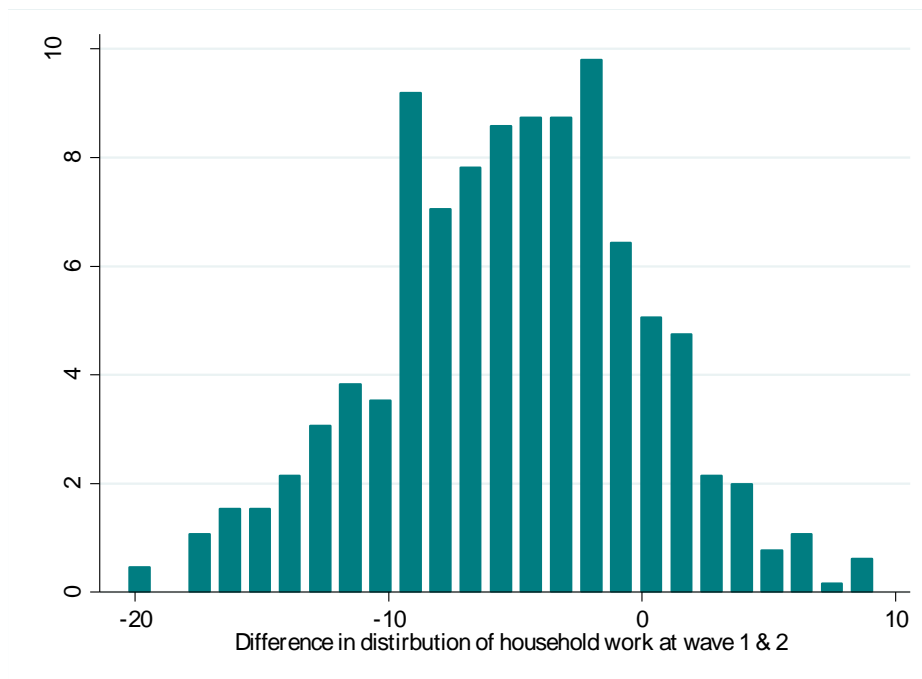


Figure 2 - The distribution of the difference in the gender distribution of household tasks at wave 1 and 2

Preliminary Findings

The preliminary results show that the arrival of the first child reinforces gender roles but that this is heavily dependent upon the pre-existing distribution of housework and the Socio-Economic Status of the couple. Those couples who were able to maintain gender equality after the birth had higher levels of relationship satisfaction but we found no evidence that they were more likely to intend to have another child. The results suggest that gender inequality is established prior to parenthood and not solely enforced by parenthood. It also suggests that the ability to maintain gender equality into parenthood is associated with stable unions but not higher order births.

In the final paper we will further examine the degree to which these results hold across the 6 countries within the analysis and present full multivariate models controlling for the necessary factors such as age, education level, employment statuses and the age of the first child at the time of wave 2 fieldwork dates.

Table 1 - The degree of genderization in household tasks in quartile groups and associated relationship characteristics

Genderization Level	Average Relationship Satisfaction	Percentage Wanting another Child in the next 3 years
Very High	8.49	26.74%
High	8.63	30.00%
Medium	8.98	25.79%
Low	9.19	24.07%

References

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