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# Policy Effects on the Division of Housework

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**ABSTRACT** *The paper examines the effect of work–family policies on households’ division of unpaid work in 25 countries. Considerable variation exists between countries in the amount of time allocated to unpaid work and the extent to which men participate in housework. Our research question is whether and to what extent different institutional arrangements, especially work–family policies, are related to this variation. The study utilizes data from the ISSP Survey on Gender Roles, conducted in 2002, and employs hierarchical linear modeling to determine individual- and country-level factors affecting the division of housework. The findings suggest that gender inequalities in the labor market and the country’s gender ideologies set the conditions for negotiation between spouses over housework and affect the level of gender equality in the family.*

The rise in women’s economic activity during the last three decades and the transition to dual-earner households in most industrialized societies marks a significant change in gender relations, especially in the workplace. In conjunction with this trend, in many western countries social policies were implemented to facilitate women’s employment, to enhance gender equality and to reduce work–family conflicts. Family supportive policies (such as fully paid maternity leave; subsidized daycare arrangements; tax deductions) have proved significant in affecting women’s labor force participation and their employment patterns, which have become more similar to those of men (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999, Gornick

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*et al.* 1998, Daly 2000, Korpi 2000, Stier *et al.* 2001). The changes in women's economic position, however, did not bring about a real change in the division of housework and care work within the family. While the amount of time women invest in housework has declined in recent decades, the increase in time spent by men on household chores only partially offset this reduction (Coltrane 2000, Gershuny and Sullivan 2003). In all industrialized countries women are still left with the major responsibility for housework and childcare. Thus, the household division of labor remains unbalanced and gender-dependent (Orloff 2002). In Hochschild's (1989) terms this is the 'stalled revolution' which, as she argues, results from the lack of institutional arrangements which could ease the life of working parents and balance work and family demands.

The role of social institutions in affecting the household division of labor is at the heart of the current paper. Our aim is to study the extent to which different institutional arrangements as revealed in work-family policies and measures of gender equality are related to country variation in the division of household labor and the amount of time allocated, by men and women, to unpaid work. Most contemporary family-supportive policies are aimed at facilitating the employment of mothers by providing women with the necessary conditions to combine work and family. Furthermore, in most industrialized societies, anti-discrimination laws and wage regulations were enacted to reduce gender-related income gaps and to improve women's position in the labor market. These policies, however, do not directly target gender relations within families, and, therefore, their contribution to enhancing equality in the division of household labor is not clear.

Theoretical models of the household division of labor suggest that labor market policies that support women's employment and improve their market position should promote equality within the household. This expectation is based on the premise that such policies give married women access to independent economic resources, which, in turn, grant them power to negotiate household relations. Several researchers have attributed country variation in the division of household labor largely to the level of support for working mothers (for example, Calasanti and Bailey 1991, Baxter 1997, Gershuny and Sullivan 2003). However, the direct effect of family policies on intra-family processes was not tested in these studies. A notable exception is the work done by Hook (2006), which found that policies aimed at supporting mothers' employment did not increase (and even depressed) men's participation in housework. Indeed, while family policies (such as maternity leave schemes and subsidized childcare arrangements) are expected, in general, to improve women's position by allowing them to combine family duties with market involvement they may, at the same time, preserve the gendered division of labor. It is important to note that men, who are still perceived as and expected to be the main providers, are often constrained by their employment contracts and have limited flexibility in contribution to housework. Family-supportive policies (also refer to as 'employment-supportive' policies) seldom target men's involvement in family work or their role as parents (except for a few paternity leave schemes) and thus it is not clear whether, by affecting women's economic activity, they also influence the behavior of women and men within the family.

The current paper sets out to explore the effects of family-supportive policies on the household division of labor. Using the ISSP (International Social Survey Program)

module on Family and Gender Role Attitudes (2002) for a subset of married (or cohabiting) men and women from 25 countries, we examine the variation in women's and men's task responsibility and time investment in housework and the extent to which they are related to institutional characteristics at the national level. In particular, we concentrate on the effect of two types of policies: family-supportive policies (such as care leave schemes), aimed at facilitating mothers' involvement in paid work, and labor market policies (such as anti-discrimination acts), which target the working population and are aimed at increasing gender equality in the labor market.

### **Women's Employment and the Household Division of Labor**

Numerous studies have documented the patterns of household work and their determinants (for example, Goldscheider and Waite 1991, Brayfield 1992, Brines 1994, Bianchi *et al.* 2000, Coltrane 2000, Bittman *et al.* 2003). These studies demonstrate that several factors at the household level are associated with a more equal participation of spouses in housework. In particular, women's employment activity has consistently been found to influence the time they devote to housework (Ross 1987, Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990, Blair and Lichter 1991, Bianchi *et al.* 2000), and, in some cases, also the participation of men in household chores (Bianchi *et al.* 2000; Davis and Greenstein 2004). Women's labor market activity affects household arrangements in several ways. First, the time available to perform household tasks is reduced; thus, even in households in which women assume the major responsibility for housework and childcare, the amount of time invested in these activities is lower than in instances where women are not employed. In these cases, the standards of housework are modified and less time is devoted to household chores (Bianchi *et al.* 2000). In other cases, some household work is delegated to other household members (the husband, children) or to market-provided domestic services (Lewin-Epstein *et al.* 2006).

A second way in which women's employment affects the division of household labor is by narrowing the power gap between the spouses. Resource-dependence theory suggests that power relations within the household are affected by the relative economic position of spouses (Blood and Wolfe 1961, Ross 1987, Brines 1994). Women's access to money of their own allows them a 'voice' (Hirschman 1970, Hobson 1990) in household matters and increases their bargaining power regarding the allocation of household chores (Brines 1994, Bittman *et al.* 2003; Evertsson and Neramo 2004). Furthermore, as women's participation in paid employment becomes universal, and as households become more dependent on dual earners, gender roles become less distinct. The blurring of gender roles in the economic sphere, we believe, contributes as well to the blurring of the traditional division of responsibilities within the household.

### **Societal Context of Family Arrangements**

Comparative studies that have investigated differences between countries in the division of housework have emphasized the role of institutional arrangements and cultural factors in affecting intra-household processes (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990, Calasanti and Bailey 1991, Baxter 1997, Batalova and Cohen 2002, Gersuny and Sullivan 2003, Davis and Greenstein 2004, Evertsson and Neramo 2004,

Lewin-Epstein *et al.* 2006). These studies varied with regard to the list of (industrialized) countries they included and the data sources they utilized. Their main findings can be summarized as follows: (a) in all countries gender is an important determinant of the household division of labor as women perform the lion's share of housework; (b) countries differ in the amount of time invested in housework, by both women and men, and in the extent of gender segregation of household chores – in some countries equality is higher because women allocate less time to housework (while men's contribution is similarly low), while in other countries men participate in unpaid work more than in others; (c) different factors may affect the division of labor and the contribution of each spouse to housework in different countries – for example, cultural factors, especially those related to gender ideology, may mediate the effects of time constraints or resource dependence on the division of housework (Bittman *et al.* 2003).

Several arguments were put forward in order to explain country differences in the patterns of time allocated to unpaid work. In one of the first comparative studies on the issue of unpaid work, Kalleberg and Rosenfeld (1990: 332) stated that 'Cross-national research is necessary to examine how variation in institutional structures, policies, and cultural values affect the division of labor between men and women in the family and in the labor market'. One of the most commonly mentioned institutional factors is the countries' welfare regime or, more specifically, the level of family-supportive policies (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990, Baxter 1997, Gershuny and Sullivan 2003, Evertsson and Neramo 2004, Fuwa 2004). Policies, especially those which directly affect women's employment such as availability of childcare facilities, maternity leave and child allowances, affect women's and men's allocation of time to paid and unpaid work and structure the relationship between work and family. In relation to this contention, Baxter (1997) argues that the implementation of family and employment-supportive programs in Scandinavia (most notably in Sweden) have made possible greater gender equality within the household. Indeed, studies have shown that in countries that support women's role as providers and grant the necessary conditions to combine work and family responsibilities women are more likely to participate in paid employment especially when family demands are high and to maintain a continuous attachment to the workforce (Gornick *et al.* 1998, Gornick and Meyers 2003, Stier *et al.* 2001). Since women who participate in paid work on a full time basis hold positions in the labor market that are more similar to men's than other women, it stands to reason that they also establish a more egalitarian division of labor at home (Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2000, Fuwa 2004). In this way, it can be argued that family-supportive policies contribute to greater equality in the division of household labor *through* their effect on women's employment patterns.

It is important to note, nonetheless, that most comparative studies did not directly test the effect of policies on the household division of labor (for an exception see Hook 2006). Rather, these studies compared several countries, assuming that observed differences in the way couples organize their domestic work are a product of institutional differences. Country differences, however, may conceal compositional (e.g., in age composition, fertility rates, educational level or the overall rate of female labor force participation) or cultural (e.g., gender equality ideologies and norms, standards of housework) differences that affect the division of domestic

work. Furthermore, a better understanding of the relationship between state policies and the organization of the household requires a more explicit specification of the policies and their relationship to micro-level action. Hence, the current study goes beyond previous studies by directly testing the effect of specific policies and institutional arrangements on men's and women's time allocation to domestic work and their division of household tasks.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the current study extends the range of countries on which previous studies were based by including both developed and less developed countries (such as Mexico, Chile, and the Philippines) as well as several former socialist countries. In so doing, we present a larger variation of institutional arrangements than has been addressed in the past, and offer a stronger test for our theoretical contentions.

Policies aimed at achieving gender equality in the labor market and in the public sphere are generally expected to influence the private sphere as well and to have an equalizing effect on intra-household processes and arrangements. Greater gender equality in the public sphere affects the division of household work by altering the extent of women's economic dependency and the relative time constraints faced by the spouses (when both take part in labor market activity) (Gershuny and Sullivan 2003, Evertsson and Neramo 2004). Baxter (1997: 220) argues that 'countries which have made substantial progress toward gender equality in terms of women's legal, political and welfare rights might also be expected to have made progress toward egalitarian gender relations at the individual level, for example in terms of the domestic division of labor between husbands and wives'. According to this argument, greater visibility of women in elite positions may serve to empower women and alter their beliefs regarding gendered division of labor. Indeed, recent studies (Batalova and Cohen 2002, Fuwa 2004) found that the degree of women's empowerment was significantly related to the division of labor across countries.

While the proposition that growing gender equality at the macro-level should eventually be reflected at the micro-household-level has been gaining support, the social mechanisms involved are not clearly understood. Two opposing mechanisms may be at work in this case. Family welfare policies may reduce the dependency of women on their spouses by altering the balance of resources, leading to a more egalitarian organization of the household. At the same time policies that encourage women's labor market participation by integrating family and work activities and reducing women's time constraints may actually contribute to greater inequality in the organization of the household. This is because reduced-hours employment, generous paid-leave schemes, and public childcare arrangements permit women greater flexibility in coordinating employment with household tasks and relieve men of the responsibility for care work (see Hook's 2006 findings).

Variation among countries in the domestic division of labor may also reflect cultural and ideological differences. Countries that endorse a more egalitarian gender ideology (such as the Scandinavian countries), tend to have a more equal division of household labor (Calasanti and Bailey 1991, Baxter 1997). Gender-role attitudes are also important in structuring the relationship within households, as Bittman *et al.*'s (2003) study demonstrates. Comparing the domestic division of labor in American and Australian families, they found that Australian women who are less dependent upon their husbands devote relatively longer hours to housework compared to women who are somewhat more economically dependent on their spouses in order to

compensate for their gender-role deviance (Bittman *et al.* 2003: 207). The authors interpreted these findings as empirical support for the 'gender role' hypothesis which posits that the division of household labor is not merely a negotiated social arrangement that balances market and family inputs of the spouses. Rather, household division of labor is constitutive in that it structures gender categories as household goods and services are being produced (Greenstein 2000).

To summarize, the current study sets out to explore the effect of three types of macro-level characteristics on country variation in the division of household labor: policies that directly affect women's employment patterns, the level of gender inequality in the labor market, and the gender ideology. Their effects are assumed to operate above and beyond the characteristics of households and spouses, such as the extent of women's involvement in paid employment; the relative resources of spouses; women's economic dependency; the presence of children in the household, and compositional differences. In addition to their effect on the overall level of housework sharing and domestic time investments, these macro-level factors are also expected to interact with the relationship between women's economic dependence and the time allocated by both spouses to housework.

### *Data and Methods*

The study utilizes the ISSP module on Family and Gender Role Attitudes, conducted in 2002 in 32 countries. The ISSP is designed to provide high quality and comparable data with the explicit purpose of multi-cultural, multi-national comparative research. To this end, particular attention was given to instrument development, question wording, ordering and meaning equivalence. Our focus on spousal relationships within the household necessitate that we exclude respondents with no spouses. Since past research has documented the strong relationship between labor market activity and household division of labor, we also limit our analysis to the age group most likely to be involved in labor market activity. Hence only married or cohabiting individuals aged 18 to 65 were included in the final sample. To the extent that gender-related policies operate via the labor market (job opportunities, equal pay, etc.) it might be argued that the effects of such policies would be revealed primarily in households that include women who take part in the labor market. Hence, we carry out our analyses once with all households, and a second time only among households in which the female spouse participates in paid employment.

For the purposes of the present study we analyze a pooled file that consists of data from the following countries:<sup>2</sup> Australia, the US, Britain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium,<sup>3</sup> Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, Israel, Japan, the Philippines, the Czech Republic, Poland, Latvia, Hungary, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, Chile and Mexico. The main focus of our study is on the effect of country-level indicators on the division of household labor. For this purpose, we collected data from OECD publications (OECD 2001, 2002) and the UN report on Human Development (UN 2002).

The analysis addresses two aspects of the household division of labor: domestic workload and the gender division of housework. The former is measured by the number of hours per week the respondents and their spouses spent on housework.

These measures capture household as well as country differences in the amount of time devoted to housework. It may be affected by household constraints (e.g., family size, distribution of housework among different family members) but could also reflect country differences in the standards of housework.

In order to capture gender inequality in housework we used a measure of the extent of spousal *sharing in household tasks*. This is calculated as the average of responses to four items that represent major tasks of daily household maintenance – doing laundry, cleaning, preparing meals and shopping. The scale for each item ranges from 1 (only the wife is responsible for the activity) to 5 (only the husband is responsible for the activity).<sup>4</sup> All analyses are carried out separately for men and women, so we are able to control for gender differences in reporting time allocation and household arrangements (Kamo 2000). The correlation between the amount of time devoted to housework by each spouse and the task sharing variable is relatively low (–0.308 for women and –0.129 for men). This provides empirical confirmation that the overall investment in housework and the way it is divided are two different aspects of domestic activities.

Our study incorporates two levels of analysis: individual level, which includes variables pertaining to individuals and their families, and country (macro) level, which includes three types of measures. One type addresses policies that support women's employment. It is measured by the number of fully-paid weeks of maternity leave, whether the country has special arrangements for paternity leave, and the percentage of children 0 to 2 years of age in public day care (OECD 2001, Clearing-house 2004). These measures best capture policy variation among countries as suggested by Gornick and Meyers (2003) and were found to affect men's time in housework (Hook 2006). Following prior work (Gornick *et al.* 1997; Mandel and Semyonov 2005, 2006) we constructed a factor using these three measures, so that a high value indicates high support for women's employment and a large negative value denotes low support. The factor scores are presented in the Appendix, Table A2.<sup>5</sup>

Labor market institutions comprise a second type of macro-level variable relevant to the organization of the household. We focus specifically on gender inequality as revealed in the ratio of women's average earnings to the average earnings of men (United Nations 2002). Lastly, we differentiate societies with respect to the prevailing gender ideology. This is measured by aggregating the gender-role index obtained from the ISSP data within each country.<sup>6</sup>

Individual/household-level indicators are used mainly as control variables in our analysis; they include measures commonly used in studies of the determinants of housework (see Bittman *et al.* 2003, Fuwa 2004 for recent examples). Past studies have found that as personal resources increase, the spouse will perform less of the housework. This is most clearly illustrated with regard to spouses' economic resources and the extent to which one spouse is dependent on another. The economic dependency of spouses is measured by a direct question posed to respondents regarding spouse's relative earnings. This measure ranges from (1) only the wife earns money (that is, total independence) to (7) only the husband earns money (total dependence). In other words, a higher value indicates higher dependency of the wife on her husband.<sup>7</sup> A second resource often considered is education. Given the large variation in educational institutions across countries, we measure education simply as the years of schooling completed.



Time availability was measured by the number of weekly hours the respondent works for pay and by the presence of children in the household. For the latter, we used an indicator to denote the presence of preschool children and a separate indicator for children 6 to 17 years old. Based on prior studies (Bittman *et al.* 2003, Bianchi *et al.* 2000, Davis and Greenstein 2004) we expect a more equal division of labor, and fewer hours invested in housework for respondents who allocate more time to paid work. The presence of children is associated with more hours of housework among both wives and husbands, but more so for the former than the latter. Consequently, the presence of children tends to increase women's share of housework (Bianchi *et al.* 2000).

Gender-role attitudes of respondents are included in the analysis since they present a direct, if limited, measure of the household gender ideology. The scoring of gender-role attitudes is based on the degree of agreement with the following statements: 'A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works'; 'All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job'; 'A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children'; 'Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay'; and 'A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family'.<sup>8</sup> The answers ranged from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree. The mean score was calculated for the five items so that a high score on the combined measure represents a more egalitarian disposition. Finally, we included an indicator to denote whether any of the four household chores is performed by a third party. The descriptive statistics for our micro- and macro-level variables are presented in the Appendix, Tables A3 and A4.

### *Hypotheses*

Based on the theoretical considerations outlined above, we expect policies that provide greater support for mother's employment to increase equality in the household, especially on employed women. However, it is possible that by reducing women's work–family conflict these policies may in fact hinder equality in household responsibility.

The level of gender inequality in the labor market is expected to be negatively correlated with equality in the household because higher earning gaps between men and women are expected to sustain traditional arrangements of time allocation and division of labor. Lastly, we expect higher levels of equality in the division of housework in countries with stronger support for gender-egalitarian ideology.

Aside from the direct effects of country characteristics on the organization of housework, we also expect certain macro-level factors to affect the relationship between the economic dependency of women (at the individual level) and housework division of labor within countries. We focus on the effect of women's economic dependency because we suspect (as Bittman *et al.*'s (2003) study suggests) that the unsystematic effect of this variable observed in several studies results from country-level differences. We hypothesize that as the level of gender equality in the labor market increases, women's economic dependency will have a weaker effect on the performance of housework. That is, while in general we expect that women's economic dependency will be associated with a less equal division of household labor (that is, women will be responsible for most housework chores and will invest more

hours in unpaid work), the magnitude of this relationship will decline as gender equality in the labor market increases. This is mainly because lower levels of earning gaps between men and women indicate more opportunities for women to achieve equality with men. We also expect that in societies that support women's employment and those with a strong normative support for gender equality the relationship between economic dependency of women and the division of housework will be stronger, because time allocation decisions will be based more on economic considerations and power relations within the household rather than on structural constraints in combining work and family or norms and culture.

### Method of Analysis

Since we are interested in the division of household labor within countries as well as among them, we employ Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) where the dependent variable is the extent of equal sharing and time spent on housework and both individual and structural variables serve as independent variables. Using HLM we are able to model the two components simultaneously, and to differentiate between the effects of individual characteristics and country-level characteristics. This method allows us to identify the factors that affect country differences in the division of household labor and also to test whether important correlates of housework performance such as women's time allocation to paid work, economic dependency, or gender-role attitudes have a similar effect on the division of unpaid labor across countries. The two-level model can be represented by a set of equations. The first is a within-country equation which models the spouses' contribution to housework as a function of the independent variables described earlier. The general form of this equation is illustrated with the following example:

$$(\text{Wife housework hours})_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{wife's economic dependency})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{wife's hours of paid work})_{ij} + \dots + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

The dependent variable is wife's housework hours in household  $i$  and country  $j$ ;  $\beta_{0j}$  denotes the (country-specific) intercept;  $\beta_{1j}$  is the coefficient referring to the effect of 'wife's economic dependency' on the number of housework hours;  $\beta_{2j}$  is the coefficient of 'wife's hours in paid work' and so on for all independent variables. Finally,  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  is the error term.

Any of the individual or household-level variables can be modeled as either random or fixed effect across countries. In all the models we allow the intercept,  $\beta_{0j}$ , (the net level of wife's hours of housework in this example) to vary across countries. We then explain this variation with our policy and other country characteristics, as presented in equation (2):

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{policy index})_j + \gamma_{02}(\text{gender inequality}) + \dots + v_{0j} \quad (2)$$

We also added the interaction between wife's economic dependency and the level of gender inequality in the country. Therefore, we allowed the 'dependency' effect,

$\beta_{1j}$ , to vary (i.e., to be random) across countries, while all other individual and household-level variables were fixed. This is presented in equation (3):

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}(\text{level of gender inequality})v_{1j} \quad (3)$$

In equations 2 and 3 the  $\beta$  coefficients derived from equation 1 constitute the dependent variables. In equation 2 the variation in the average time women devote to housework across countries (variation in the intercept) is modeled as a function of contextual factors (e.g., maternity leave, gender equality in pay; gender ideology). A negative sign of  $\gamma_{02}$ , for example, supports our claim that in countries with higher gender equality in pay women allocate fewer hours to housework. In equation 3 country differences in the effect of wife's dependency on the time they allocate to housework (country-specific coefficient  $\beta_{1j}$  (dependency)) is modeled as a function of the countries' level of gender equality in pay. Again, a negative sign of  $\gamma_{11}$  indicates that the economic dependency of women is less consequential for the time they devote to housework as gender equality in the labor market rises. The other variables that we include in the model are interpreted in a similar way.

## Findings

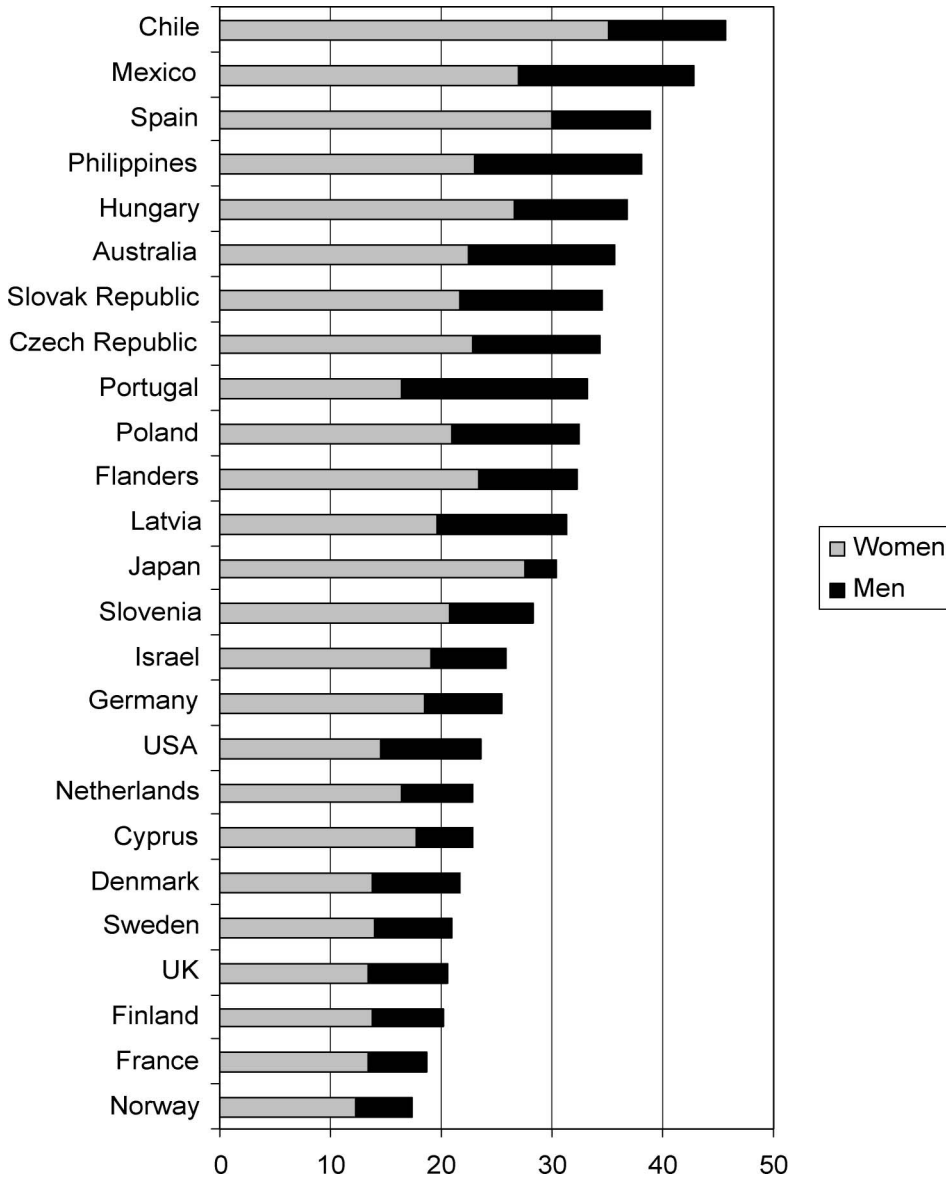
We begin the analysis by presenting the distribution of our two indicators of housework (respondent's and spouse's time in unpaid work and the level of housework sharing) across countries, for men and women separately. The figures are adjusted for respondents' age and education and whether they have children in the household to account for compositional differences across countries.

Figure 1 depicts country variation in the amount of time women and men allocate to housework.<sup>9</sup> The cross-national variation in women's housework is considerable, even after adjusting for differences in demographic and household composition, ranging from about 35 hours a week in Chile to 12 in Norway. The figures for the time men devote to housework underscore the small amount of time they allocate to unpaid work in all countries. Yet, clear differences exist among countries – men in Portugal, Mexico and the Philippines (according to reports of male respondents) allocate more than 15 hours a week to housework, compared to Japanese men, who devote less than three hours.

From Figure 1 we also observe substantial country variation in the total amount of time couples devote to housework, ranging from over 40 hours in Chile and Mexico to less than 20 hours in Norway and France. This country variation, after controlling for differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of the population, may result from behavioral differences such as the rate of women's employment or the extent to which housework is relegated to external domestic differences. Differences in housework may also result from different standards in performing housework, and do not necessarily indicate variation in the level of inequality in the distribution of unpaid work. In order to gauge the time differences between spouses, we turn to the housework sharing in housework.

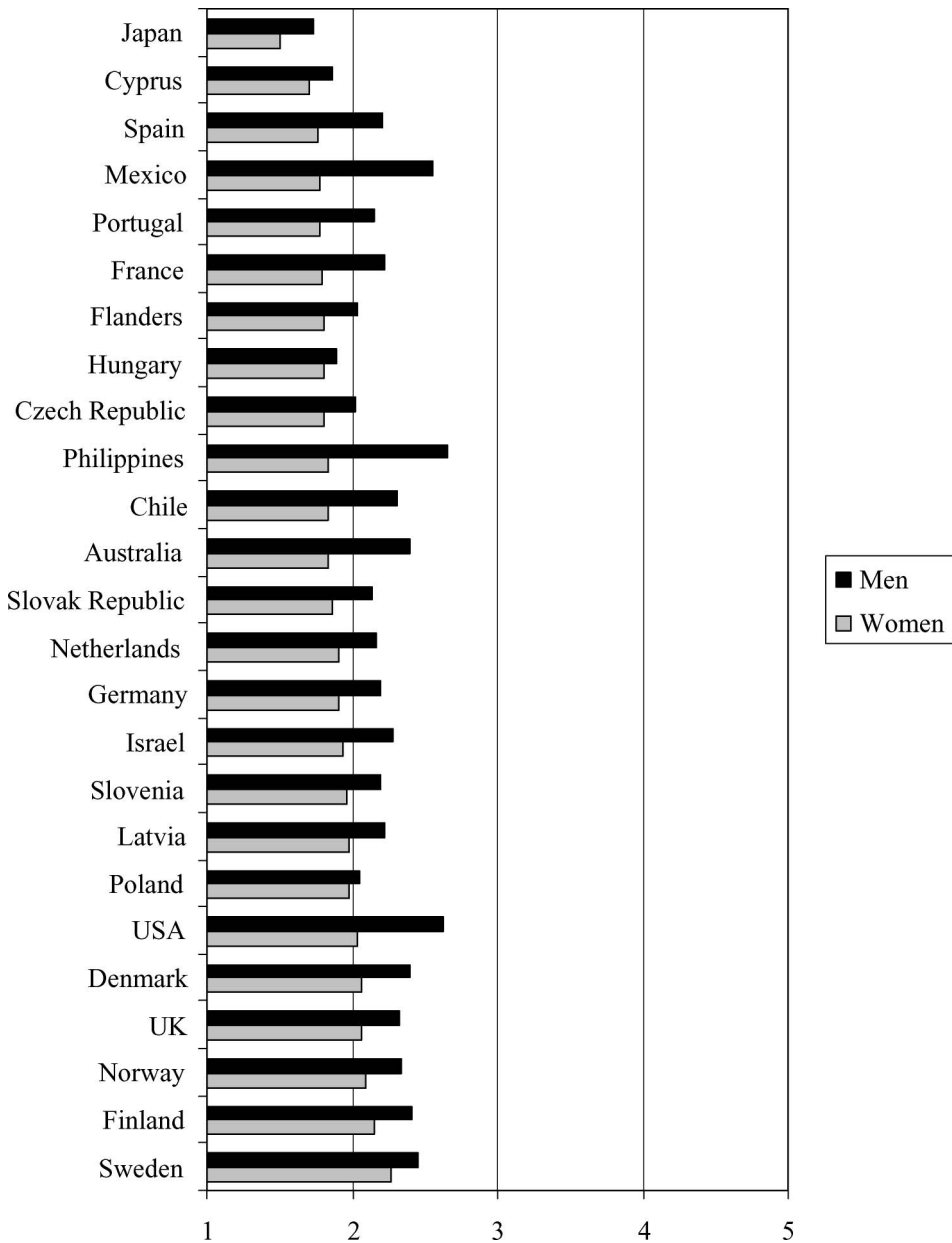
Figure 2 presents the level of sharing in housework and reveals the unequal division of labor apparent in all countries, but also underscores the large country variation. Values lower than 3 indicate that women are responsible for the bulk of

**Figure 1.** Women's and men's weekly hours of housework adjusted for age, education and presence of children



housework. Indeed, according to both female and male respondents this is the case in all countries. Men in all countries tend to report greater sharing in household responsibility than females report for their male spouses. Judging from female reports, the level of sharing in housework is highest in Sweden, followed closely by Finland and Norway. The differences between female and male reports in these countries are quite small. Judging once again from women's reports, the level of

**Figure 2.** Level of housework sharing by country and sex of respondent, adjusted for age, education and presence of children



spousal sharing in the responsibility for household chores is lowest in Japan, Cyprus and Spain. Gender differences in reporting are especially high in the USA, where, on the average, men report an almost equal division of housework, and similarly in Mexico, the Philippines and to a somewhat lesser extent in Australia.

*Individual- and Country-level Determinants of the Division of Housework*

The second stage of the analysis focuses on the effect of country-level characteristics on the household division of labor, controlling for individual-level characteristics. Since men and women provide somewhat different reports of the division of household labor and the time allocated to housework, we present separate models for male and female respondents. For each gender we present three models: a null model, a full model for the entire population, and a full model for households where the woman participates in the labor force.

Table 1 presents analyses of the amount of time women and men allocate to housework (based on their own reports). Models 1 and 4, for women and men respectively, are null models which include no independent variables. These models permit one to evaluate the variation across countries in time devoted to housework. Based on the variance components of these models we calculated that 21 per cent of the total variance in the model reported by women, and about 12 per cent in the model reported by men derives from country differences.<sup>10</sup>

The second column in Table 1 presents the individual- and country-level determinants of time devoted by women to housework. The effect of variables at the individual level is in line with the theoretical arguments and findings in prior studies. Time constraints affect the number of hours women devote to housework: the presence of children in the household increases women's time allocation to housework while working for pay decreases it. Also, younger, more educated, cohabiting women, and those who hold more liberal attitudes regarding gender roles, invest fewer hours in housework. As expected, women, who are economically dependent upon their spouses perform more hours of unpaid work, and the use of domestic help decreases the time women allocate to housework.

Two macro-level factors affect the average time invested in housework: gender equality in the labor market, and gender ideology, while employment-supportive policies have no effect on country variation in time devoted to housework. Women invest fewer hours in housework in countries that achieved greater gender earning equality ( $\gamma = -24.463$ ) and in more egalitarian countries ( $\gamma = -5.097$ ). We interpret these macro-level relationships as creating an environment for greater gender equality in housework, either as a result of men increasing their effort in carrying out household chores or as a result of lowering the standards of housework (Bianchi *et al.* 2000).<sup>11</sup> To demonstrate the effect of gender equality (relative earnings of women to men) on the country's average weekly hours of housework performed by women we calculated the expected hours for a woman with average characteristics in selected countries. Other macro-variables are fixed at the mean. The calculations are based on model 2 in Table 1 and presented in the first part (A) of Figure 3. According to the figure, 'the average' woman who lives in Sweden performs about 3.5 fewer hours a week than a similar woman who lives in the Netherlands. The same woman, in Mexico, performs 6.5 more hours a week than her Swedish counterpart.

In addition to its effect on the average number of hours devoted to housework, the level of gender equality in the labor market modifies the relationship between women's economic dependency and the time they allocate to unpaid work – as market equality rises, the effect of women's dependency on the number of housework hours declines ( $\gamma = -4.365$ ). The interaction effect is illustrated in the first part (A) of

**Table 1.** Multi-level models predicting weekly housework hours (standard errors) in 25 countries, by gender of respondent

	Women			Men		
	1 Null	2 All women	3 Working women	4 Null	5 All men	6 Men w/working spouses
<i>Individual-level variables</i>						
Intercept	19.625* (1.360)	19.111* (0.712)	16.109* (0.604)	9.302* (0.644)	9.040* (0.426)	5.511* (0.450)
Age		0.115* (0.019)	0.106* (0.021)		0.033* (0.012)	0.026 (0.017)
Education		−0.334* (0.065)	−0.259* (0.074)		−0.083 (0.033)	−0.058 (0.043)
In cohabitation		−2.861* (0.549)	−2.032* (0.473)		−0.196 (0.230)	−0.195 (0.330)
Kids <6 in household		1.438* (0.371)	0.759* (0.366)		0.149 (0.280)	0.277 (0.393)
Kids 6–17 in household		2.029* (0.374)	1.875* (0.236)		0.898* (0.205)	1.210* (0.239)
Weekly working hours		−0.107* (0.019)	−0.081* (0.020)		−0.050* (0.010)	−0.055* (0.011)
Gender role attitudes		−1.374* (0.222)	−1.389* (0.212)		0.069 (0.140)	0.089 (0.142)
Woman's dependence		0.455* (0.153)	0.162 (0.104)		−0.580* (0.093)	−0.683* (0.129)
Third party doing HH		−4.331* (0.827)	−3.384* (0.729)		−1.628* (0.492)	−2.000* (0.449)
<i>Country effects on intercept</i>						
Employment-supportive policy index		−0.192 (1.109)	−0.361 (0.843)		0.476 (0.586)	0.545 (0.606)
Gender equality in pay		−24.463* (7.865)	−17.331* (5.172)		1.789 (5.450)	1.295 (5.462)
Gender ideology		−5.097* (1.937)	−5.416* (1.524)		−7.212* (1.392)	−7.328* (1.553)
<i>Country effects on women's dependence</i>						
Employment-supportive policy index		0.286 (0.220)	−0.163** (0.083)		0.029 (0.116)	0.046 (0.161)
Gender equality		−4.365* (2.038)	−0.453 (1.132)		0.611 (1.332)	1.776 (1.557)
Gender ideology		−0.062 (0.524)	0.272 (0.247)		0.500 (0.333)	0.407 (0.438)
<i>Variance components</i>						
Intercept	47.696	15.991	9.298	10.539	4.804	5.466
Level 1	179.899	153.199	101.687	80.381	77.599	69.183
N (n countries)	10788(25)		6058(25)	8405(25)		4974(25)

\*p &lt; 0.05; \*\*p &lt; 0.10.

**Figure 3.** The net effect of gender wage equality on country's average level of housework measures

Part A Effect of gender wage equality on women's hours of housework

Part B Effect of gender wage equality on housework sharing

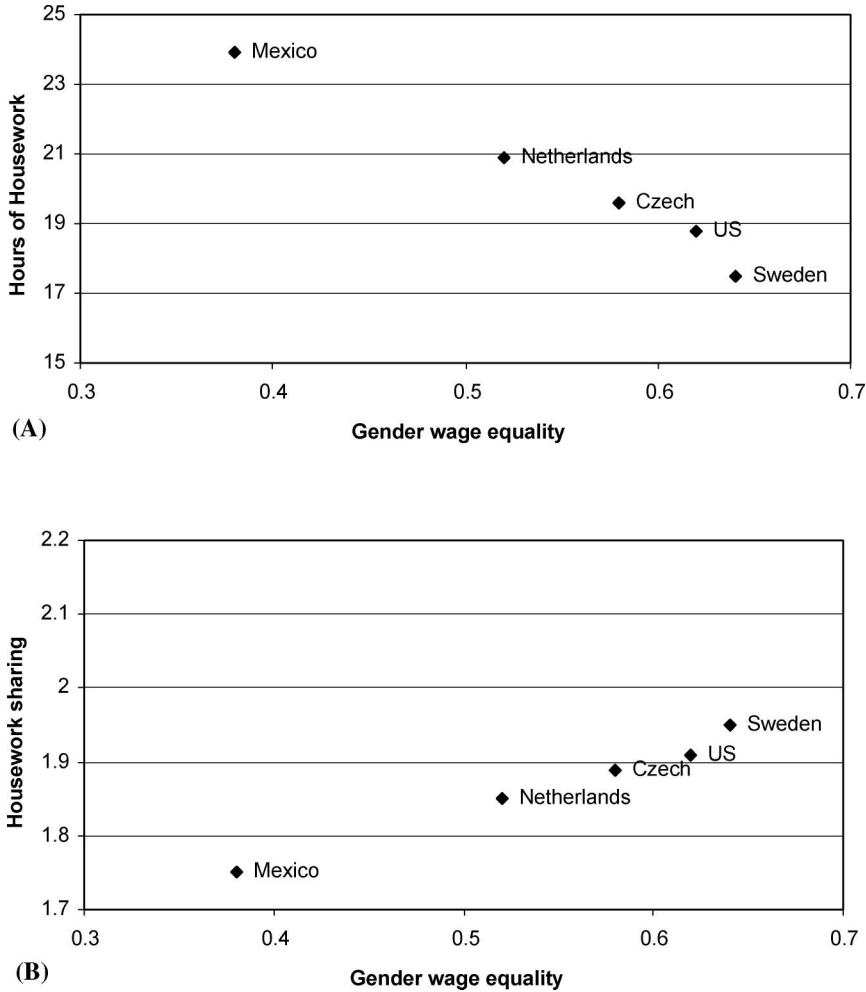


Figure 4. This effect may indicate greater equality in time allocation, although the comparable effect in the men's model (see column 5 in Table 1) reveals a non-significant effect of gender wage equality on men's time allocation in general, and a non-significant interaction with women's economic dependency. In other words, these findings suggest that while gender equality in the labor market improves women's position within the household, it is not through greater involvement of men in housework but rather results from a decline in the time women (and probably the entire household) devote to unpaid work.

Model 3 of Table 1 repeats the analysis for households with working women. As can be seen, most of the micro-level effects remain unchanged. Two exceptions are

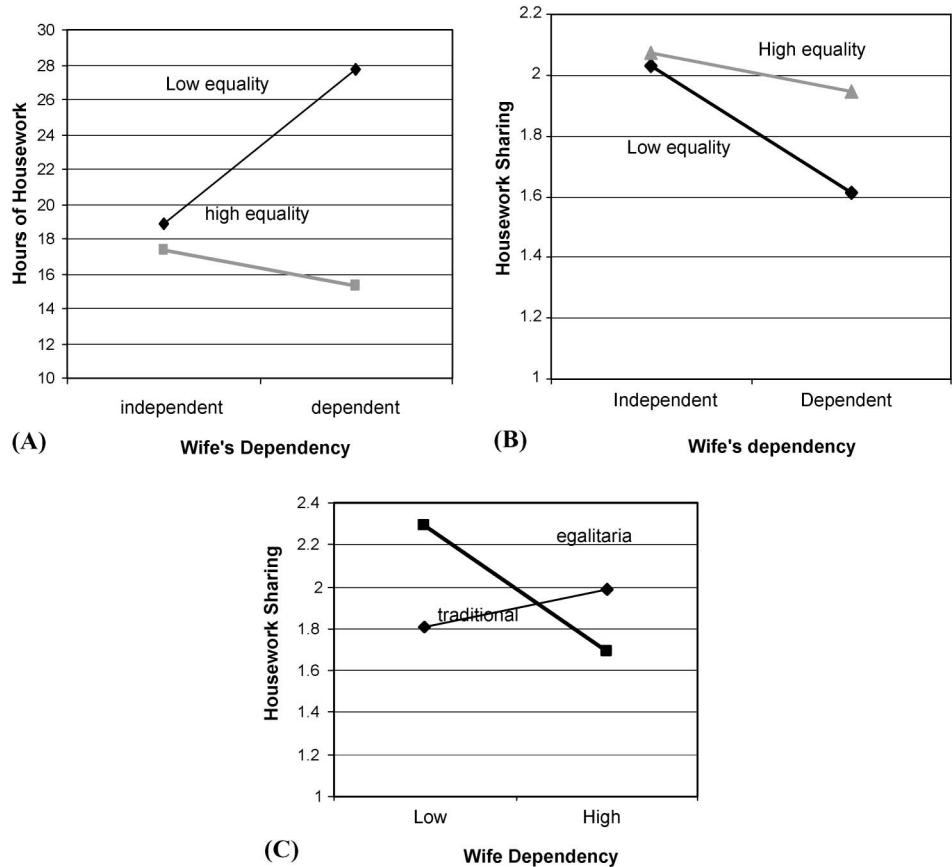


**Figure 4.** Effect of women's dependency on the household division of labor by country characteristics

Part A (based on Table 1) Effect of country-level wage equality on the relationship between wife's dependency and hours of housework

Part B (based on Table 2) Effect of country-level wage equality on the relationship between wife's dependency and housework sharing

Part C (Based on Table 2) wife's dependency and housework sharing



noteworthy: the main effect of women's economic dependency is not significant, and the effect of the presence of children, while still positive, is considerably weaker. These findings imply that whether women work or not accounts for a major part of the relationship between these two variables and women's investment in housework. Working mothers still invest more hours in housework, but they may have alternative arrangements for their young children, consequently reducing their own workload. Interestingly, the main effect of the macro-level variables is similar to those observed for the entire population, but the interaction with women's economic dependency has changed considerably. First, among working women economic dependency is less pronounced in countries with high support for women's employment ( $\gamma = -0.163$ , significant at the 0.10 level). Second, there is no interaction between the extent of gender equality in the labor market and women's

economic dependency. This means that given women's decision to participate in the labor force, it is employment-supportive policies rather than market conditions that affect their bargaining power and time allocated to housework. This is mediated, most probably, by patterns of employment women choose to engage in.

Models 4 and 5 in Table 1 pertain to the number of hours men allocate to housework. The variance components of model 4 (the null model) indicate that 12 per cent of the total variation is accounted for by the country differences in men's hours of housework. Model 5, which presents the individual and macro-level effects on men's housework hours, shows that, compared to what we found in the case of women, relatively few factors affect men's allocation of time to housework – older men and those who have school-age (but not preschool) children invest more hours in housework. Having an economically dependent wife, working longer hours in the labor market and having domestic services reduce men's participation in unpaid work. At the macro-level, gender ideology is the only factor that is related to the average number of hours men allocate to housework ( $\gamma = -7.212$ ) – in countries with more egalitarian gender ideology men actually allocate fewer hours to housework. This finding supports our earlier interpretation according to which couples in more egalitarian countries tend to invest less time in housework either because they lower the standards of housework or because they outsource more household tasks. The same analysis was performed only for men whose spouses were in the labor force. The results, presented in model 6, are similar to the findings for the entire population (model 5), suggesting that the factors related to the time men allocate to housework are rather independent of their spouses' employment status.

Table 2 presents coefficient estimates for country- and individual-level effects on gender inequality in housework. The null models (models 1 and 4, for women and men, respectively) reveal that country variation in housework sharing accounts for 8 per cent of the total variance in the model reported by women, and 9 per cent in the model reported by men. Models 2 (based on women's reports) and 5 (based on men's reports) present the effects of individual and country characteristics. The individual-level characteristics, used in this study mostly in order to control for variation within countries, operate as expected regardless of respondent's gender: the negative effect of age indicates that in households with older women or men the household division of labor is more traditional; that is, the woman performs most of the housework. Cohabiting couples are more egalitarian than married ones and better educated respondents report greater equality in housework. The findings lend support to the 'time availability' argument, according to which women who allocate more time to market work have a more egalitarian division of labor, while men who invest more time in paid work, are less likely to share responsibility for housework. While the presence of children is likely to increase the amount of housework, the increase falls disproportionately on women, as there is less sharing of household responsibilities among couples with children at home. The negative coefficient for women's economic dependence indicates that household tasks tend to be less equally shared when women's dependency increases. More egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles are associated with a more egalitarian division of housework. Lastly, relegating the housework to a third party increases equality within the household.

The macro-level variables have only moderate effects on the level of housework sharing. First, the index of policies that support women's employment has no effect

**Table 2.** Multi-level models predicting level of housework sharing (standard errors) in 25 countries, by gender of respondent

	Women			Men		
	1 Null	2 All women	3 Working women	4 Null	5 All men	6 Men w/working spouses
<i>Individual-level variables</i>						
Intercept	1.892* (0.038)	1.919* (0.024)	2.026* (0.028)	2.228* (0.045)	2.204* (0.042)	2.316* (0.046)
Age		−0.005* (0.001)	−0.007* (0.001)		−0.007* (0.001)	−0.006* (0.001)
Education		0.021* (0.002)	0.023* (0.003)		0.016* (0.002)	0.017* (0.003)
In cohabitation		0.117* (0.018)	0.113* (0.025)		0.137* (0.024)	0.125* (0.029)
Kids <6 in household		−0.043* (0.012)	−0.041* (0.017)		−0.059* (0.021)	−0.036 (0.024)
Kids 6–17 in household		−0.081* (0.014)	−0.080* (0.015)		−0.048* (0.014)	−0.055* (0.016)
Weekly working hours		0.003* (0.000)	0.005* (0.001)		−0.003* (0.001)	−0.004* (0.001)
Gender role attitudes		0.088* (0.010)	0.093* (0.015)		0.084* (0.013)	0.074* (0.015)
Woman's dependence		−0.041* (0.005)	−0.042* (0.007)		−0.101* (0.007)	−.088* (0.010)
Third party doing HH		0.083* (0.022)	0.036 (0.023)		0.699* (0.075)	0.645* (0.087)
<i>Country effects on intercept</i>						
Employment-supportive policy index		0.032 (0.026)	0.043 (0.026)		0.055 (0.042)	0.062 (0.049)
Gender equality in pay		0.671* (0.240)	0.352 (0.271)		0.392 (0.439)	0.020 (0.536)
Gender ideology		−0.010 (0.053)	0.016 (0.059)		−0.114 (0.125)	−0.173 (0.143)
<i>Country effects on women's dependence</i>						
Employment-supportive policy index		−0.002 (0.006)	0.004 (0.007)		−0.010 (0.009)	−0.006 (0.013)
Gender equality		0.135* (0.041)	0.059 (0.066)		0.275* (0.077)	0.237* (0.107)
Gender ideology		−0.065* (0.014)	−0.066* (0.015)		−0.056* (0.023)	−0.085* (0.035)
<i>Variance components</i>						
Intercept	0.037	0.014	0.017	0.051	0.047	0.055
Level 1	0.413	0.370	0.380	0.537	0.451	0.414
N (n countries)		10788(25)	6058(25)		8405(25)	4974(25)

\*p &lt; 0.05.

on the household's division of labor. Model 2 suggests that as wage equality between men and women in the labor market increases, so does the level of equality within the household ( $\gamma = 0.671$ ). Part B in Figure 3 demonstrates the effect of gender wage equality on the country's level of housework sharing. Accordingly, in Sweden, where gender equality in earnings is the highest, the average household has a more equal division of labor (1.94) compared to a Mexican household with similar characteristics (the level is 1.78), which is located in an environment that is less gender-equal. This effect is in the same direction but less pronounced and not statistically significant in the model estimated for men. Contrary to our expectations, the prevailing gender ideology in a country has no effect on the level of housework sharing.

In addition to the main effect of gender equality in the labor market on the level of sharing in housework, this variable interacts with women's dependency. This interaction effect ( $\gamma = 0.135$  based on women's reports), which is illustrated in Part B of Figure 4, suggests that in countries with higher wage equality the effect of women's economic dependency on the sharing of household tasks is weaker than in countries characterized by lower levels of market equality. One possible explanation for this macro-micro interaction is that higher wage equality may mean better prospects for women in the labor market, so that even at times when they only work part time or depart from the labor force their potential economic power remains a consideration in the negotiation of housework.

Gender ideology has no effect on the level of housework sharing, but the interaction effect of gender ideology (at the macro-level) and women's economic dependency within the household suggests a more complex relationship, as can be seen in Part C of Figure 4, which is based on women's report. In countries that promote the blurring of gender distinctions the effect of women's economic dependency on intra-household arrangements is more pronounced ( $\gamma = -0.065$ ). This is likely due to the fact that in more egalitarian countries women are expected to take an active economic role and the distinction between more traditional and 'radical' families is pronounced. In more traditional environments, however, there is a greater acceptance of household gender segregation (less housework sharing) and the negative effect of women's dependency levels on the sharing of household tasks disappears and even reverses its course (although the relationship is quite weak). To the extent that in societies characterized by a more traditional gender ideology there is less sharing of household responsibility when women are less economically dependent than when they depend more on their spouses, this might be attributed to what Greenstein (2000) termed 'deviance neutralization', which is used by spouses to cope with what, in view of the prevailing (traditional) social norms, might be considered deviant identities.

The comparison of models 2 and 3 (all households and households with a working female head) reveals, once again, interesting differences. While most micro-level variables operate in similar ways, the macro-level indicators have no effect on the division of labor in households in which women participate in the labor force. This means that the effect of market gender equality, for example, which was positive in the entire population, operates mainly through women's employment status. Once they decided to work, the policies and ideologies are less consequential to the household division of labor. In addition, while gender ideology mediates the effect of women's economic dependency on time-sharing arrangements among working women's

households, this is not the case for gender equality. As was evident in Table 1, once women work, gender equality has no effect on the way their bargaining power affects equality within the household. Again, the models based on men's reports (models 5 and 6 which pertain to all households and those with a working woman, respectively) are similar, indicating that men's reports are less dependent on whether their spouse works for pay.

## Discussion

This study set out to examine the effect of social policies regarding women's employment and gender equality on the household division of labor among 25 countries. Our findings indicate that in all countries housework is mainly women's work, although we found considerable variation in the extent to which household chores are shared by couples, and in the time devoted by men and women to housework. In addressing country variation we focused on the effect of three important macro-level characteristics: (1) family-supportive policies, represented in this study by an index composed of the number of fully-paid weeks of maternity leave; the rate of childcare coverage and whether the country provides paternity leave; (2) gender-related labor market policies, which were operationalized as the female/male wage rate; and (3) the prevalent gender-role ideology in the country which was operationalized as the average score for the country on an index of gender-role items.

Our findings reveal that family-supportive policies, while encouraging the participation of women in the labor market (Gornick and Meyers 2003, Gornick *et al.* 1998) had no direct effect on the household's division of labor, or the spouses' time allocation. We believe that the non-effect of these types of policies<sup>12</sup> results from the contradictory effects they have on the organization of the household. On the one hand, these policies allow women to allocate time to market work and to establish a continuous attachment to the labor market. In this sense, one would expect such policies to affect the way couples organize and allocate housework, and, in particular, to affect the extent of housework sharing. On the other hand, these policies are not aimed directly at increasing gender equality, but rather are oriented toward alleviating the conflict between home and work which is often experienced by women. To the extent, then, that such policies are successful, they permit women to participate in market work without 'disturbing' in any meaningful way the division of family responsibilities. In other words, these policies affect the organization of the household in contradictory ways, and therefore their effect on housework arrangements is unnoticed.

As opposed to family-supportive policies' lack of effect on the household division of labor, greater gender equality in the labor market is positively related to the rate of equality within the family. These findings lead to the conclusion that labor market provisions which are intended to increase gender equality in pay (such as equal opportunity legislation; wage regulations; affirmative action) extend their effect into families and the way family members organize their time and home-based activities. Moreover, greater equality in the labor market also affects the way couples negotiate housework at the micro-level. We found that in countries with higher levels of gender equality, women's dependency upon their spouses is less consequential to the household division of labor. However, this was not the case in households where

women worked for pay. While women's prospects in the labor market affect the perceived negotiating power of spouses, once women enter the labor force it is the specific, rather than the general, conditions that affect the division of labor. In other words, in countries with high gender equality, all women achieve greater parity in housework because they can, potentially, increase their resources and are not penalized for not working. However, once women enter the labor force, it is not the general conditions of the market that are important, but rather the specific work pattern and actual earnings. In this respect, the findings suggest that policies that encourage women to allocate more time to paid work or those that facilitate continuous attachment to the labor force are associated with a lower burden of housework for women and they tend to set the conditions for achieving higher equality in the household division of labor.

The cultural effects observed in our analysis are more complex and less intuitive than the policy effects. First, more egalitarian gender ideologies are associated with lower overall levels of housework. This means that for women in more egalitarian countries housework becomes a less meaningful component of their social identity, and thus greater equality in housework is achieved through a reduction of time spent in household activities. Second, gender ideology hardly affected the overall level of housework sharing, and when it did the effect was not consistent with all of our expectations. Yet we did find that in more egalitarian countries women's economic resources and their own gender attitudes are more important as determinants of the division of labor. In this respect, cultural characteristics of countries determine the nature of negotiations within household and the extent to which women's economic resources and their employment activity allow them to gain greater equality in housework.

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### **Notes**

1. Hook's study tests directly the effect of several family-supportive policies on men's allocation of time to housework. The current paper differs in its dependent variables and macro and micro-level indicators, as we explain later in the text.
2. Since country-level data were available for only 25 countries, we limited the analysis to this subset of the ISSP sample. The entire list of countries included in the ISSP dataset is presented in the Appendix, Table A1.
3. Only Flanders took part in the ISSP project.
4. A sixth category noted that a third person was mostly responsible for the task. In this case the value was recoded to represent mainly women's responsibility assuming that it is mainly women who take responsibility for recruiting and controlling the domestic help. Additionally, a dummy variable was created to indicate whether a third person was responsible for any household task.
5. We employed principal components factor analysis to derive factor scores. Five of the countries (Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, the Philippines and Mexico) did not have data on childcare arrangements.

- We therefore used the overall mean to replace these missing values. Excluding these cases from the analysis did not change the results, so we decided to keep all 25 countries in the final models.
6. We considered, in addition, controls for the country's GDP, overall income inequality (GINI coefficient) women's labor force participation, percentage of women working part-time (OECD 2002), and the average number of hours women work for pay (the latter variable was calculated from the ISSP sample) and other variables. The correlation matrix for the different macro-level variables considered for the analysis is presented in Appendix, Table A5. Given the relatively small number of countries, only a limited number of macro-level variables could be included in the models. In several analyses we carried out the above variables did not modify the effects of the three measures of interest; therefore, none of these variables were included in our final models.
  7. This measure is commonly used in studies based on ISSP data (see for example Batalova and Cohen 1999, Stier and Lewin-Epstein 2000, Fuwa 2004, Lewin-Epstein and Stier 2004). It is preferred over the calculation of spouses' relative income since the ISSP provides data on respondent's and family's income but not that of the spouse.
  8. Exploratory factor analysis revealed that all five items score highly and approximately equally on one factor. Only respondents (and not their spouses) were presented with the attitude items, so that we take the derived scores to measure the gender ideology that characterizes the household.
  9. Women's and men's hours of unpaid work are based on their own reports.
  10. The country's relative variation for women, for example, is calculated as  $47.696/(47.696 + 179.899)$ .
  11. This effect may also indicate greater time constraints on women, if more egalitarian countries also have higher levels of female labor force participation. However, in models not presented here, we found no effect of the rate of female labor force participation, or the average hours (at the macro-level) they devote to paid work on the country's average time in housework.
  12. As we stated earlier, another common indicator of employment-supportive policies, the percentage of children and infants in day care also did not have an effect on the different measures of the household division of labor.

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**Appendix****Table A1.** List of countries included the ISSP project and in the analysis

	Included in the research	N (in analysis)	
		Female	Male
Australia	+	456	403
Brazil			
Bulgaria			
Chile	+	442	362
Cyprus	+	324	267
Czech Republic	+	517	273
Denmark	+	444	368
Finland	+	462	366
Flanders (Belgium)	+	412	376
France	+	830	389
Germany	+	459	420
Great Britain	+	522	387
Hungary	+	292	241
Ireland			
Israel	+	426	291
Japan	+	347	286
Latvia	+	295	254
Mexico	+	495	331
Netherlands	+	376	351
New Zealand			
Northern Ireland			
Norway	+	531	464
Philippines	+	447	388
Poland	+	368	288
Portugal	+	331	212
Slovenia	+	329	297
Slovakian Republic	+	362	296
Spain	+	646	571
Sweden	+	358	306
Switzerland			
Taiwan			
United States	+	333	234

**Table A2.** Factor scores for policy index

Variable	Factor score
Weeks fully-paid maternity leave	0.743
% children 0–3 in public day care	0.712
Paternity leave available	0.770
Eigenvalue	1.652
% variance	55.1

**Table A3.** Means (standard deviations) and percentage distribution of individual-level variables

	Women's report	Men's report
Age	42.19 (−11.76)	44.59 (−11.48)
In cohabitation	14.6	14.3
Education in years	12.03 (−3.71)	12.24 (−3.86)
Wife's dependency level	4.88 (−1.55)	5.17 (−1.35)
Other person doing housework	0.07	0.06
Kids age 6–17 in household	0.42	0.42
Kids age 0–5 in household	0.25	0.23
Working hours	22.59 (−19.67)	37.54 (−19.97)
Gender attitudes	3.10 (−0.90)	2.99 (−0.86)

**Table A4.** Means (standard deviations) of macro-level variables

	Mean	Maximum	Minimum
Female to male wage rate	0.57 (−0.11)	.74	.37
Employment supportive policy index	0.0	−1.17	2.19
Country's gender role ideology – men's report	2.97 (−0.38)	3.80	2.44
Country's gender role ideology – women's report	3.09 (−0.43)	3.89	2.38

**Table A5.** Pearson correlations between various macro-level variables

	Female to male wage rate	Female gender-role attitudes	GINI coeff.	Female labor force participation rate	GDP per capita	Average female working hours
Family policy	0.433	0.545	−0.404	0.339	0.347	0.798
Female to male wage rate		0.387	−0.471	0.776	0.157	0.488
Female gender-role attitudes			−0.460	0.341	0.850	0.469
GINI coeff.				−0.571	−0.346	−0.364
Female LF participation rate					0.188	0.461
GDP per capita						0.285