



Children's Participation in Housework: Is there a case of gender stereotyping?

Evidence from the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB).

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INTRODUCTION

Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims at achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Applied universally, this goal explicitly calls for recognition of the value of unpaid care and domestic work that is disproportionately borne by women. Gender is one of the key characteristics in explaining the variations of input to household work both by adults (Blair and Lichter, 1991; Bianchi et al. 2000; Crompton et al. 2005) and by children (Bianchi and Robinson, 1997; Cohen, 2001; Evertsson, 2006; Gershuny and Sullivan, 2014). A specific feature of children's input is that, to a great extent, adults control its nature and amount (Vogler, Morrow and Woodhead, 2009). Although this control is expected to decline over childhood and adolescence, children's participation in domestic tasks will probably continue to be influenced by the prevailing gender norms and expectations within the family and community.

Evidence from national studies in developed and developing countries suggests that girls spend more time on housework. The most common explanation relates to behaviour modelling as a mechanism of gender role reproduction: children form habits based on parental models (Cunningham, 2001). For example, girls in families with a strong or traditional division of labour may follow their mother's example by taking on more household chores (Evertsson, 2006). Literature generally supports this hypothesis suggesting that gender differences in children's housework are associated with the adult division of labour in the home or its interplay with parents' employment behaviour (Hu, 2015; Álvarez and Touya, 2012, Blair, 1992). Factors that seem to influence boys' housework, much more than girls', are the extent of fathers' involvement in housework and/or having a mother with a higher education (Dotti Sani, 2016; Bonke, 2010; Evertsson, 2006).

This Brief contributes to the literature by providing comparative evidence from 12 high income countries on potential 'gender stereotyping' – assigning gender roles in the family according to sex. We investigate a) if there is a common pattern across this group of industrialized countries indicating that girls are more involved in housework than boys; b) whether we could detect growing gender disparity in children's housework with age.

DATA

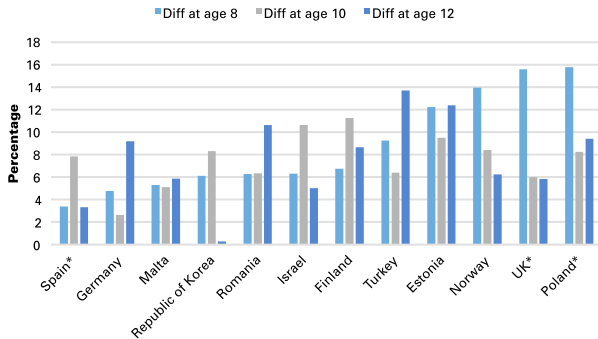
The International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) is a survey on children's subjective well-being. It collects representative data from children themselves across developed and developing countries and across three age groups (8, 10 and 12). Using the second wave of the survey (2013/2014) we analyse the extent of gender differences in children's participation in housework in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Republic of Korea, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Children in all age groups were asked 'How often do you usually spend time doing the following activities when you are not in school?'. One activity type was helping around the house. Possible responses are 'rarely or never', 'less than once a week', 'once a week' and 'every day or almost every day'. The constructed dependent variable categorises these responses into 'rarely or never', 'occasional' and 'daily'.

RESULTS

Girls do more housework in all countries

Our data show a very consistent pattern of gender differentials. In all 12 countries, more girls than boys report participation in housework on a daily basis (Figure 1). Meanwhile more boys say that they never or rarely help.

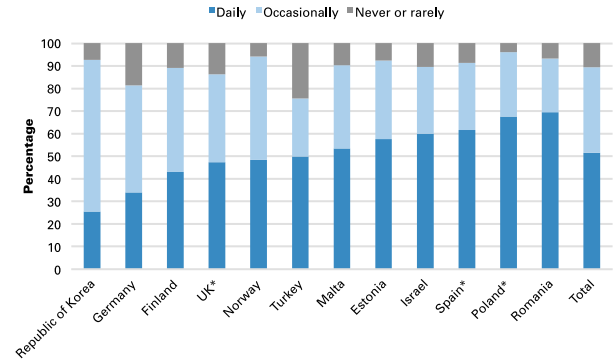
Figure 1. Absolute gender difference in girls' and boys' share of daily participation in housework by age



Note: In some countries, only one region or administrative area was sampled as follows: Poland – Wielkopolska region; Spain – Catalonia; Turkey – Istanbul; United Kingdom – England.

Source: Children's Worlds, the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) 2013/2014.

Figure 2. Proportion of children reporting 'Helping around the home' at the age of 8



Note: Unweighted average across the sample of 12 countries. In some countries only one region or administrative area was sampled as follows: Poland – Wielkopolska region; Spain – Catalonia; Turkey – Istanbul; United Kingdom – England.

Source: Children's Worlds, the International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB) 2013/2014.

The largest gender difference overall is found in Norway (14 percentage points), Poland and the United Kingdom (16 percentage points) at age 8. Yet, there seems to be no common pattern in gender differences across the three age groups. In four countries (Germany, Malta, Romania and Turkey) the gender gap peaks at age 12, in another four (Israel, Finland, Republic of Korea, and Spain) at age 10. In Norway, Poland and the United Kingdom the gap substantially narrows for older children (age 10 and 12). We do not observe any significant difference between boys and girls at age 12 in the Republic of Korea. This seems to be driven by substantial reduction in girls' participation rather than an increase in boys' engagement.

The majority of 8 to 12-year-olds help with household chores either occasionally or on a daily basis

Figure 2 compares 12 countries on the intensity of children's help in the house at age 8. The results suggest that the majority of children become actively involved in housework from a very young age. On average, across 12 countries about 52 per cent help around the house every day, about 38 per cent of children in this age group help the family 'occasionally', and 11 per cent of 8-year-old children report helping with household tasks 'rarely or never'. The extent of 8-year-olds' engagement in household chores varies substantially across our sample of countries. In the Republic of Korea less than 8 per cent report no participation in housework, but the great majority of those who help around the house do so only occasionally (67 per cent). Meanwhile in Poland and Romania 68 per cent and 69 per cent respectively of those who help in the house do so on a regular, daily basis.

We find that on average across 12 countries, the proportion of 12-year-olds who report daily housework is lower than among 8-year-olds. This seems to be compensated by an increase in participation on an occasional basis. But the observed pattern does not vary by gender. It is possible that factors such as schooling affect the change in boys' and girls' participation in housework equally over the life-course. For example, at age 12 all children are likely to be in secondary school and will therefore spend more time on other activities including schoolwork assignments. Reallocation of their time to other activities can reduce their contribution to household chores.

Encouraging children to help with work around the house may be seen as a way to socialize or have 'family time'. Using multivariate regression we find that in Estonia, Poland and the Republic of Korea the more strongly children agree that they 'have a good time together in my family', the more likely it is that they engage in helping with housework, controlling for deprivation, gender and family structure.

CONCLUSION

This brief has shown that participation in household chores is an essential part of children's lives. There is a common pattern of a gender gap between boys' and girls' daily participation in housework across a diverse range of socio-economic and cultural contexts in 12 high-income countries. The persistence of this gap points to gender stereotyping – a form of gender role reproduction within a family that potentially can reinforce inequalities over the life-course. Meanwhile, we find no consistent pattern of the

gender gap widening with age, suggesting complex interactions between children's participation in housework and other types of activities within and outside the family home.

Helping parents is a valuable process for learning and socializing. But children exercise less choice in this type of activity as their actions are likely to be motivated and guided by adult members of the family. Further comparative research would help to understand the dynamics within the family and the impact of gender stereotyping on child well-being.

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