

Gender Differences in Housework Among Unipersonal Households: A Cross-National Analysis

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Introduction

Housework is not a gender-neutral domain; instead, men and women tend to conform to their expected gender roles. According to these gender role expectations, housework is often considered a feminized activity, with women typically being held as the primary responsible, while male stereotypes suggest that they should avoid it (West and Zimmerman 1987). The time allocated to housework tasks is often used as an indicator to measure gender inequality within a population. Scholars have developed several theories to explain why women tend to do more housework than men from various perspectives. The most common perspectives include the relative resource perspective, time availability, and the doing gender theory (Domínguez-Folgueras 2022). However, most studies that apply these theories focus on the general population or couples. Much less is known about the time devoted to housework among individuals living in unipersonal households. For those living alone, there are no negotiations regarding roles and task division, as only one person is responsible for doing and/or planning housework duties. Moreover, studies that evaluate gender differences in housework time in unipersonal households are often limited to specific countries, and to our knowledge, there are no studies that explore this topic from a cross-national perspective.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the time devoted to housework in 20 countries from various regions of the world. Previous studies from the US have shown that women in unipersonal households tend to perform more housework than men, although they also do less than married or cohabiting women (Chao 2022; Cheng and Sayer 2023). Housework time for individuals in unipersonal households is also influenced by their time availability, resources, as well as their internalized gender identities, expectations, and cultural beliefs (Cheng and Sayer 2023; Thébaud, Kornrich, and Ruppner 2021). It is reasonable to expect that the behavior related to housework by men and women in unipersonal households will exhibit similarities to what is observed in the general population in each country.

Data and Methods

In this study, I use time use diary data from 20 countries collected from various harmonized databases. Time use surveys are widely regarded as the most reliable data source for measuring

the distribution of time within a population (Sevilla 2014). The samples are drawn from the Harmonized Time Use Survey (HETUS) and the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS), with data collected around the year 2010. Additionally, I use data from the 2021 Argentinian Time Use Survey provided by the National Statistical Institute. From the original databases, I select individuals who are 20 years old and older, resulting in a total of 395,318 respondents included in the analysis, of which 64,485 live in unipersonal households. Table 1 provides specific details about the characteristics of the samples.

Table 1. Sample Description

COUNTRY	Year	Source	N	Unipersonal
Argentina	2021	NSI	4804	1176
Austria	2008/09	HETUS	7391	1438
Belgium	2012/13	HETUS	9548	1296
Canada	2010	MTUS	13799	3487
Estonia	2009/10	HETUS	8658	1051
Finland	2009/10	HETUS	6326	895
France	2009/10	HETUS	26662	5909
Germany	2012/13	HETUS	21673	2742
Greece	2013/14	HETUS	12946	1798
Hungary	2009/10	HETUS	7649	1414
Italy	2008/09	HETUS	34120	5109
Norway	2010/11	HETUS	6403	1186
Poland	2012/13	HETUS	73160	11820
Republic Serbia	2010/11	HETUS	6438	804
Romania	2010/11	HETUS	51604	10988
South Africa	2010	MTUS	29608	4231
South Korea	2009	MTUS	33158	2460
Spain	2009/10	HETUS	17475	1713
United Kingdom	2014/15	HETUS	11474	1658
United States	2010	MTUS	12422	3310
Total			395318	64485

Source: Own calculation from the HETUS, MTUS and Argentinian Time Use Survey.

From the diaries of daily activities, I calculate the time that respondents reported spending on household chores, which encompass tasks such as cleaning, food preparation, cooking, and doing laundry. These are considered the most disliked and traditionally feminine-defined housework tasks, where gender differences tend to be more pronounced (Altintas and Sullivan 2016).

In the analysis, I initially compute the time devoted to household chores by individuals living in unipersonal households and compare these estimates with those of the population residing in other living arrangements. Due to the limitations of the harmonized datasets, I only differentiate between couples living alone and couples with at least one child under 18 years old, categorizing other living situations as "others." I calculate the average time spent by both men and women in each living arrangement and also compute gender ratios.

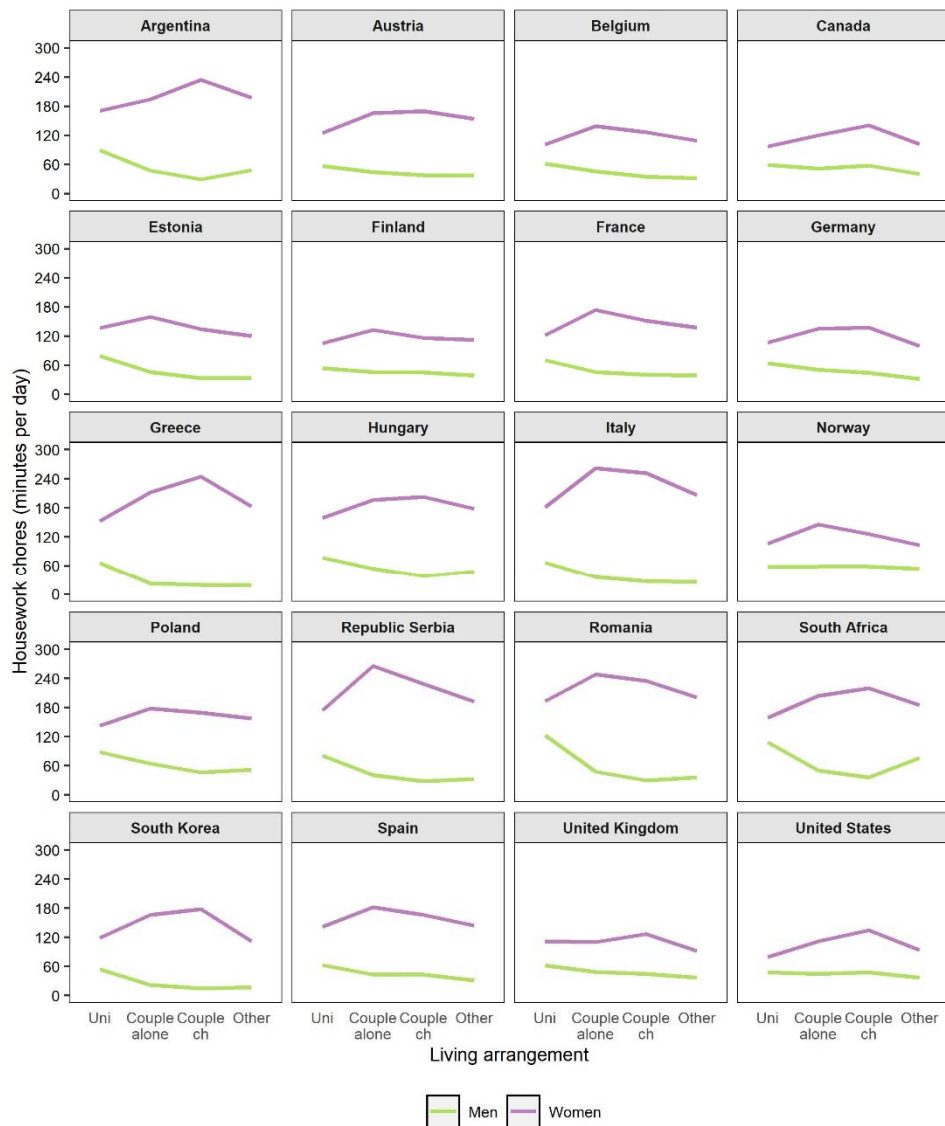
Subsequently, I plan to focus on unipersonal households. I compute estimates of time spent on household chores for individuals living in unipersonal households, broken down by age and educational attainment, as well as distinctions for weekdays and weekends. I also explore the

relationship between housework and time spent on paid work. Finally, I will employ general linear models, using time spent on housework chores as a dependent variable, with gender as an explanatory variable, while controlling for age, level of education, time spent on paid work, and the day of the week. From these models, I will calculate predicted values for housework by country and gender.

Preliminary results

Figure 1 illustrates the time spent on housework chores by men and women in four different household types. The estimates reveal that women generally engage in more housework than men across all living arrangements, including individuals living alone. However, the gender differences are less pronounced in one-person households.

Figure 1. Time spent on housework chores by male and female in different living arrangements



Source: Own calculation from the HETUS, MTUS and Argentinian Time Use Survey.

In unipersonal households, women tend to devote more time to housework than those in other living arrangements, while men tend to spend less time. However, the extent of these variations varies among countries. When compared to those living with a partner and children, women in solo households, on average across all countries, spend 40 minutes less on housework chores. The most significant differences are observed in Greece (91 minutes less for women in solo households) and Italy (70 minutes less), while the smallest difference is noted in Finland (11 minutes less) and the United Kingdom (14 minutes less). Estonia is an exception as women in unipersonal households spend 3 minutes less on this activity than those living with couples and children. For men, those living alone spend an average of 26 minutes less on housework chores than those living with couples and children. Romania (92 minutes less) and South Africa (73 minutes less) show the largest differences. On the contrary, for Norway, Canada, and the United States, there is almost no difference. Men's time spent on housework chores remains relatively stable across different living situations, as clearly seen in Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries, where the line on the graph remains almost flat for men.

Turning our attention to unipersonal households, in countries where women dedicate more time to housework chores, they spend approximately three hours on this activity. Romania, Italy, and Serbia lead the ranking in this regard. Conversely, in countries where women spend less time, the average is around one hour and 40 minutes, with the exception of the United States, where it is one hour and 20 minutes. The countries with the lowest contribution to this activity are predominantly Anglo-Saxon, Central European, and Nordic countries.

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