

# **Do less gendered unpaid work arrangements during the Covid-19 pandemic lead to higher satisfaction from the division of childcare and housework among parents?**

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## **Introduction**

Due to pandemic-induced restrictions and the closure of childcare and schools, parents were compelled to reorganize caregiving and housework responsibilities. Despite a slight increase in men's involvement in domestic tasks, women, especially mothers, continued to bear the brunt of additional unpaid care work, as seen across OECD countries. Previous research, predominantly based on time use data, has underscored the connection between women's well-being and their hours of paid work and housework, while these factors less influence men's well-being. Understanding these associations is vital for comprehending gender-based well-being disparities during the pandemic. Most studies traditionally use self-reported life satisfaction to gauge subjective well-being, but a research gap exists in assessing parents' satisfaction with unpaid work arrangements during the pandemic, particularly among women. The significant shifts in work-family dynamics during this period provide a unique opportunity to address this knowledge gap. Given the uneven distribution of partners' unpaid work within household during the pandemic, understanding the extent of their satisfaction with the division of unpaid work becomes imperative. This study aims to delve into the relationship between the division of childcare and housework tasks and the degree of satisfaction they derived from them. Of particular interest is exploring gender differences in satisfaction regarding these unpaid work divisions.

## **Theory**

Given the imbalanced distribution of unpaid work during the covid by the empirical literature, gender differences in satisfaction derived from the division of unpaid labor can be explained using both the equity theory (Ruppanner et al., 2017) and the role strain model (Milkie et al., 2002).

According to equity theory, women who experience an abrupt surge in their unpaid work burden during a given period may deem the distribution of labor as inequitable. They might perceive that their contributions significantly outweigh those of their male partners, leading to feelings of inequity and dissatisfaction. If women believe their efforts are undervalued and not adequately reciprocated, their satisfaction may decrease. From the role strain model perspective, women may struggle to balance the new pandemic-induced responsibilities with their existing roles. This increased strain can result in reduced satisfaction, as they may feel overwhelmed, overburdened, and unable to meet their various role expectations effectively.

Men who recognize the inequity in the division of labor and actively engage in sharing responsibilities may experience increased satisfaction, as they align their actions with the principles of equity theory. On the other hand, men who resist making adjustments or fail to perceive the imbalance in unpaid work may remain content if they continue to benefit from the disproportionate labor division, albeit at the expense of their female partners. Moreover, men who actively participate in reducing their female partners' unpaid work burden may experience increased satisfaction, as they may feel a sense of accomplishment in supporting their partners. However, men who resist participating in unpaid work or face societal pressure to conform to traditional roles may experience reduced satisfaction if they perceive their contributions as conflicting with their expected gender roles. Building upon these theoretical insights, we formulate the following hypotheses: When adjusting for individuals' gender attitudes, more equal or even degendered division of unpaid labor will be associated with higher satisfaction concerning childcare and housework allocation (H1). This positive relationship will be more prominent among female partners, signifying the presence of a gender disparity that favors female partners (H2). Among individuals with gendered pre-pandemic unpaid labor divisions, the gender gap will be more pronounced compared to those with degendered divisions (H3).

### **Date and method**

For our empirical analyses, we harnessed the Familydemic Harmonized Dataset (FHD), issuing from a survey initiative encompassing random samples, with a minimum of 2,000 respondents per country, consisting of parents with dependent children. Data collection occurred from June to

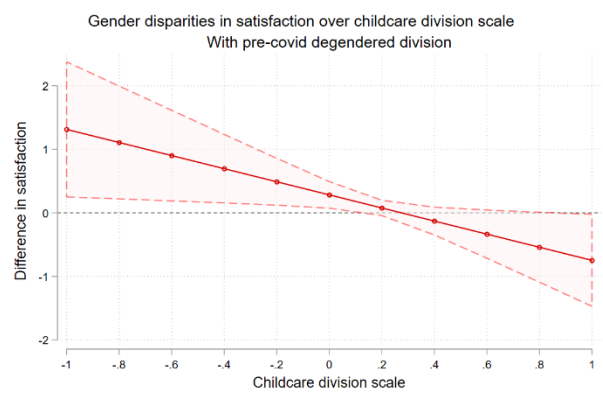
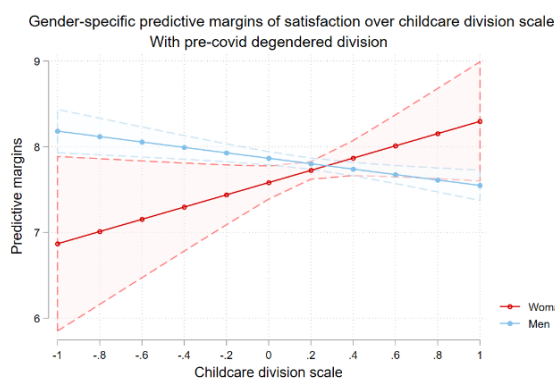
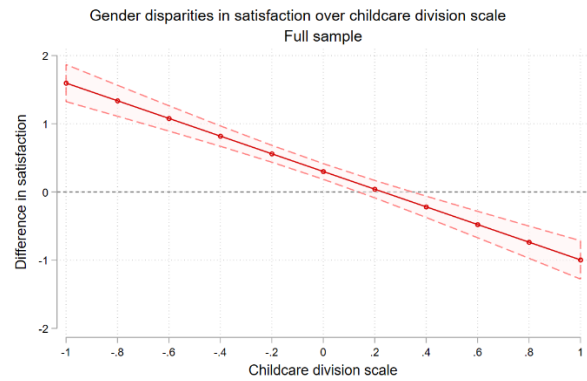
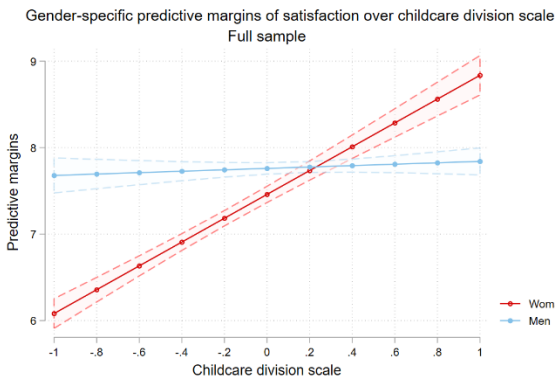
September 2021 and spanned six nations: Canada, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and the United States. For the sake of this study, we restricted our sample to heterosexual parents. This study employed two dependent variables to gauge respondents' satisfaction with the division of child-related tasks and housework. Responses were recorded on a ten-point scale, spanning from "Extremely dissatisfied" to "Extremely satisfied." The primary independent variables were derived from participants' responses regarding the allocation of 12 specific child-related and household tasks during the pandemic. Our childcare division index was generated by considering various routine child-related activities, each assigned a weight based on its perceived significance within the caregiving context. The housework division index was created by summing all relevant routine housework activities, excluding repair and maintenance tasks. The childcare and housework indices have a numerical range of -1 to 1. The value of -1 represents a complete gendered division of unpaid labor, signifying that the female partner is solely responsible for unpaid work tasks. A value of 0 indicates an equitable division of unpaid labor between men and women. Value of 1 indicates a fully degendered division, implying that it is the male partner who predominantly performs unpaid work tasks.

Our empirical models integrated an array of additional demographic control variables and employment-related characteristics, including age, the number of children, the age of the youngest child, education level, marital status, respondents' employment status, a binary indicator for dual earners, and a binary indicator signifying whether respondents worked from home during the pandemic. We also incorporated gender attitudes in our empirical analysis. Our empirical approach involved implementing a fixed-effect OLS regression strategy that included country indicators, thereby allowing us to account for unobservable country-level factors. Additionally, we included interactions between unpaid division indices and gender identifiers to investigate gender disparities. To ensure a thorough analysis, we stratified our models based on pre-pandemic unpaid labor division, conducting separate regression analyses for gendered and degendered pre-pandemic arrangements.

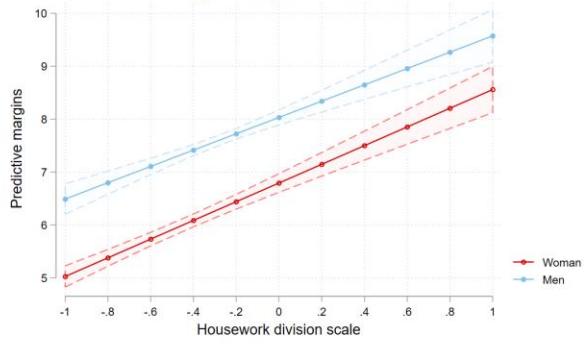
### **Preliminary results**

The findings consistently demonstrated that the adoption of an equal or degendered arrangement for the division of unpaid work during the pandemic correlated with heightened levels of

contentment regarding the allocation of childcare and housework responsibilities. Furthermore, our investigation unveiled that the enhancement in satisfaction linked to transitions toward less gendered arrangements was notably more pronounced among female partners as opposed to their male counterparts. Interestingly, for fathers who had already adopted equal or degendered arrangements preceding the pandemic, these shifts were associated with diminished satisfaction. Our empirical findings regarding the gender gap in satisfaction, across the full range of values of childcare and housework indices showed that the further the division of unpaid labor deviates from gendered arrangement the wider was the gender gap in satisfaction. It is important to highlight that in cases where individuals had degendered pre-pandemic housework arrangements, the gender gap in satisfaction remained persistent even as the level of pandemic housework division increased, signifying that the gender gap in satisfaction did not disappear at higher levels of pandemic housework division, characterized by relatively progressive arrangements. Due to space limitations, below we only show exemplary figures from our paper.



Gender-specific predictive margins of satisfaction over housework division scale  
With pre-covid gendered division



Gender disparities in satisfaction over housework division scale  
With pre-covid gendered division

