

The Division of Household Labour Among Dual-Earner Parents in Norway
- The Effect of Employment Schedules.

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Abstract

Since the early 1990's it has been an important goal in Norwegian work-family policy to increase the father's involvement in household labour. Incentives such as extended parental leave, introduction of the father quota, flexible working hours and more subsidized kindergartens have proven successful, although fathers still spend less time on child-care and housework than mothers. In this paper we use a nationally representative survey conducted by Statistics Norway in 2002 to examine the impact of the parents' employment schedules on the division of childcare and housework. Contrary to findings from the U.S. (Presser 1988, 1994) we find that Norwegian parents' sharing of all household tasks depends more on how much they work, rather than when they work. We suggest that this largely is due to the extensive child-care benefits in Norway.

Extended abstract

A more equal sharing of paid and unpaid labour between mothers and fathers has been an important objective in Norwegian work-family policy for decades. It has been a goal to facilitate the labour participation of mothers and to increase the fathers' involvement in child-care and housework. Incentives such as extended parental leave, introduction of the father quota, flexible working hours and more subsidized kindergartens have proven successful. Mothers' participation in the labour force has increased substantially and more fathers share the parental leave with the mother.

However, despite numerous government incentives, fathers' time spent on household labour has changed little in the last 30 years. According to the 2000-2001 Norwegian Time-Use Survey, mothers spend twice as much time on household tasks compared to fathers. As a result, Norwegian researchers are interested in exploring why household tasks are not more equally shared, and in particular why fathers do not participate more at home. This study is a contribution to the current discussion on fathers' involvement in Norway, and the first quantitative analysis exploring the impact of the parents' employment schedules.

We largely rely on similar studies from the U.S. Presser (1988, 1994) finds that couples where the husband works non-daytime or rotating shifts, and the wife works day shifts share household tasks more equally than couples where both work during the day. In addition, she finds that when dual earner couples have different employment schedules, most fathers are the principal providers of childcare when mothers are employed. We expect to find similar relationships for Norway.

The analysis is based on a nationally representative survey conducted in 2002 by Statistics Norway. The telephone survey deals with parental leave preferences, and includes several

questions on labour force participation, working hours and employment schedules, in addition to questions about the division of household labour. A final sample of 1,131 married or cohabiting dual-earner couples with children 1-7 years of age are used in this analysis.

The dependent variable is the degree of relative sharing of all household tasks between the mother and father. The respondents were asked to indicate who in the household normally performs different household tasks regarding child-care, housework and maintenance. A mean aggregate measure for the couple is constructed using the answers from the mother and the father. Using a multiple regression model we regress the parents' employment schedules on the dependent variable, controlling for number of children under six years of age in the household, age of the youngest child, the parent's working hours, education, income and age.

Contrary to our expectations and findings from the U.S. (Presser 1988, 1994) our preliminary analysis indicates that couples with different employment schedules do not share household tasks more equally than other couples. Norwegian parents' sharing of all household tasks depends more on how much they work, rather than when they work. The father's contribution at home increases with the mother's working hours and his time available away from work, regardless of the parents' working schedules.

We suggest that this may be due in part to the extensive child-care benefits in Norway and the increased labour participation of mothers. More than two thirds of all children aged 1-5 attend kindergarten in Norway. The kindergartens receive significant subsidies from the state as well as from the municipalities, making it affordable and desirable for most parents to make use of the kindergartens even though a parent may be at home during the day. Thus it is possible that fathers involvement in household tasks increases only when the mother works beyond opening hours of the kindergarten, when she is unable to perform the household tasks herself and the father has free time to spend. Since most part-time employed are women and men often work long hours, household labour remains a gendered undertaking.

Literature:

Presser, H. (1994): Employment Schedules Among Dual-Earner Spouses and the Division of Household Labor by Gender. *American Sociological Review*, 59 (June):348-364.

Presser, H. (1988): Shift Work among American Women and Child Care. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 48(August):551-563.