

Why women are still left doing most of the housework

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An Oxford University study says if current trends continue, women will probably have to wait until 2050 before men are doing an equal share of the household chores and childcare. According to the paper published in the latest issue of the journal *Sociology*, ‘substantial and persistent obstacles’ remain.

The international study, conducted by the ESRC-funded Center for Time Use Research at Oxford, has analysed more than 348,000 diary days from 20 to 59-year-olds in 16 countries. It finds that we are in the middle of a 70-80 year trend towards [equality](#) in housework and caring.

Barriers to equality include the gender-specific view of whether certain household chores were ‘men’s’ or ‘women’s work’. ‘Routine housework’

such as cleaning, cooking and caring for family members is viewed as ‘feminine’ while ‘masculine’ roles include non-routine chores like DIY, car care and outside work.

The amount of time women spend on routine housework still ‘dwarfs’ time spent on non-routine domestic jobs carried out by men.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that the gender gap in housework and [child care](#) has been narrowing gradually. Women’s time spent on caring and chores in the home declined gradually from about 360 minutes a day in the 1960s for both the UK and US to 280 and 272 minutes, respectively, in the early 2000s. In the UK and the US, men went from spending 90 and 105 minutes a day, respectively, on housework and child care in the 1960s to 148 and 173 minutes in the early part of this millennium. However, the data suggests that the upward trend for men may have levelled off in some countries in recent years.

Dr. Oriel Sullivan, a Research Reader from the Department of Sociology, said: "Even though women are still responsible for the major share of unpaid work, studies suggest that the gender gap in the time spent doing both paid and unpaid work is closing slowly. We’ve looked at what is hampering equality in the home, and we have found that certain tasks seem to be allocated according to whether they are viewed as “men’s” or “women’s work”. Employment and child care policies also play a part: in those countries where women are regarded as full members of the primary labour force – as in the Nordic countries - rather than mums or home-makers, there is greater gender equality in the sharing of domestic work too."

"Child care is an interesting contrast to routine housework because for both men and women, the time that's spent in child care has been increasing quite dramatically, contrary to many media panics about the effect that women moving into employment in large numbers would have on child development and the time children get to spend with their

parents," added Dr. Sullivan.

Nordic countries where employment policies encourage women to enter the labour force by providing better maternity and paternity leave, and public childcare services were found to have greater equality in the sharing of domestic tasks at home. The UK, like the US, Canada and Australia, is governed more by market forces than by egalitarian social policy and, according to the study, this does not provide the same level of equality for women in the workplace or at home. The growth of the service sector which relies heavily on shift work, and long or fragmented hours, tends to reinforce traditional gender roles in the home, as [housework](#) has to be done on a routine basis and does not match well with the men's long working weeks, the study suggests.

Co-author Professor Jonathan Gershuny, Director of the Centre for Time Use Research at the University of Oxford, said: 'Despite equality in educational access and in legal requirements for equality in the workplace, [women](#) still take a primary role in domestic work. Men are doing more, but their contribution is primarily in the defined 'masculine' non-routine tasks in the home.'

Provided by Oxford University

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