

# Study: Sharing household chores can lead to income gains

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Married women in patriarchal societies become more socially and

financially independent when they participate in counseling with their spouses aimed at breaking gender norms, according to new research from a University of Texas at Arlington economist.

In turn, men in these relationships find new respect for their partners and take on more household roles, allowing for better communication and a gain in overall household employment and income, the research indicates.

Ashish Sedai, assistant professor in economics, conducted his research using a randomized control trial with 900 couples in Kanpur, India. The goal of the study was to see how relationship counseling (learning by learning) and community-based, couples-oriented activities (learning by doing) affect women's overall socioeconomic condition.

The purpose of the intervention was to break stringent patriarchal norms and examine if such intervention could reduce household responsibilities for women, which restricts their labor force participation. In addition, the intervention aimed to foster [mutual respect](#) and trust among couples.

One group of 300 couples received four counseling sessions with four different topics: gender equality, [gender stereotypes](#), gender discrimination, and trust and cooperation. Another group of 300 couples received the same counseling, plus some trust activities, including a game involving blindfolds where the couple would have to guide one another to a target. The last 300 couples formed the [control group](#) with no interventions.

The results of this research showed that women in the group that received both counseling and community-based couple activities increased their employment time by 43 minutes. Much of the increase in employment for women was driven by small-scale self-employment.

Additionally, Sedai found that men who received counseling and participated in couples-based activities increased the time they spent on household chores by nearly 36 minutes per day. Men who received counseling without couples-based activities increased their time spent in domestic activities by 24 minutes. Overall, the findings highlight that "learning by doing" is significantly better than just "learning by learning" in improving women's labor force participation, Sedai said.

"If the burden of the household production is only on one person, then that one person's likelihood of getting a job is reduced," he said.

While [counseling](#) was an important part of Sedai's research, he said he found that couples spending time together and doing activities strengthened the households even further. Domestic violence also went down among the couples participating in the study.

While the study occurred in India, Sedai said couples all over the world can learn from his research, which emphasized respect and communication.

"If couples can spend quality time with each other, that could improve trust, cooperation, respect and eventually improve women's [labor force participation](#) in patriarchal contexts," he said.

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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