

## Analyzing housework through family and gender perspectives

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**H**ousework shapes the invaluable role that women play in the society. From childbirth to child-rearing and child-nurturing, women primarily perform the task of raising the country's future productive citizens and human resources. However, given that the time allocated to housework affects the time spent on market work, this raises several critical issues based on economic and sociological perspectives.

This *Policy Note* analyzes the role of wage and attitudes toward gender roles within the family in determining the time allocated to housework. It aims to expand the list of determinants of housework hours and provide an accurate valuation of housework helpful in fostering more favorable environments for women.

### **Contextualizing housework in the Philippines**

Time allocated to housework affects the time spent on work and its underlying implications are more pronounced among women because they must strike a balance between work and family life. On the positive side, women in the Philippines are relatively more empowered than most women in other Asian countries. However, there are deep-seated social elements that shape the women's set of economic opportunities.

First, despite the increasing trend in women's labor force participation, Hersch and Stratton (1994) found that women still perform a sizable chunk of housework even when they earn more than their spouses. This issue is aptly referred to as *second shift* or overburden

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in sociology research, or *time poverty* in researches that attempt to render poverty more multidimensional.

Second, housework and other services performed for household's own consumption are not accounted for in the System of National Accounts computations. In most settings, roles traditionally assigned to a specific gender greatly contribute to how society values specialization (Cagatay 1998). For instance, women nurture and their comparative advantages are in housework. Meanwhile, men provide and their place is in the labor market. As a result, women's contributions to society tend to become undervalued, if not invisible.

Possibly due to these deep-seated values, the country has the highest fertility rate in the region at three children born per woman (CIA 2016). Given that taking care of children and the elderly typically falls on women's sphere of responsibilities, women may find it hard to focus on their market work, in case they have one. Hence, women may be situated in a relatively disadvantageous position, if not, face de facto discrimination in the formal labor market.

**Table 1. Respondents' time allocation to market work and housework, average**

	Male	Female
Market work*: respondent	45	44
Market work*: spouse	422	47
Housework* : respondent	15	26
Housework* : spouse	22	13
Wage** : respondent	6538	5574

\* hours per week; \*\*monthly income (in PHP)

Source: Authors' computation based on data from ISR (2002)

### The role of wage and attitudes in housework

Based on the 2002 International Social Survey Program (ISSP) conducted by the Institute of Social Research, female respondents and wives devote more time to housework than male respondents and husbands in the Philippines. Although their time devoted to market activities are roughly the same, male respondents earn higher wages than female respondents (Table 1).

Out of the total observations, around 28 percent female (26%, male) respondents disagree/strongly disagree that men should do a larger share of childcare. Meanwhile, around 20 percent female and male respondents disagree/strongly disagree that family life suffers when women work. More so, 47 percent female (45%, male) respondents agree/strongly agree that both husband and wife should contribute to household income (Table 2).

These emphasize the importance of attitudes on gender roles to understand household outcomes and are consistent with the dynamics of household relationships where spouses learn to adapt and adjust to accommodate each other's attitudes, values, and preferences. This is in line with the cooperative household framework (Fortin and Lacroix 1997; Browning and Chiappori 1998) where marriage is treated as a repeated game and each game reveals information that couples take into account into the succeeding rounds. The information collected shape intrahousehold outcomes such as who does what and who decides which.

**Table 2. Respondents' attitudes toward gender roles on work and family (in percent)**

Attitude	Male Respondents	Female Respondents
Men should do larger share of childcare.		
Strongly agree	3	2
Agree	10	10
Neither	11	10
Disagree	21	24
Strongly disagree	5	4
Family life suffers when women work.		
Strongly agree	5	5
Agree	17	17
Neither	8	8
Disagree	16	17
Strongly disagree	4	3
Both husband and wife should contribute to household income.		
Strongly agree	20	24
Agree	25	23
Neither	3	2
Disagree	2	1
Strongly disagree	0	0

Note: Authors' computation based on data from ISR (2002)

### Study on wage, attitudes, and housework

Studies on housework is usually cast within the human capital framework because they only deal with how housework influences wages. However, inspired by the work of Akerlof and Kranton (2000) on identity economics, recent literature has emphasized the importance of attitudes in various labor market outcomes. In this literature, the division of household labor is shaped by age-old norms/traditions. This is in contrast with Becker's theory (1991), which establishes that specialization is associated with comparative advantages shaped by economic returns.

Our study analyzes the role of wage and attitudes toward gender roles within the

family and their role in determining the time allocated to housework, which is important in the study of labor market outcomes. Doing so expands the determinants of housework hours, which makes the analysis of housework richer and reflective of cultural norms. Our study uses the mother's employment history as an instrument to address the bias arising from wage being an endogenous variable. Using the 2002 ISSP and instrumental variable technique, our study finds that:

1. Male respondents' wage negatively affects wives' time devoted to housework. This suggests that elements other than specialization according to comparative advantage affect the couples' time allocated to nonmarket activities.



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One possible element is the complementarity of husband and wife's time devoted to housework. An increase in the price of a good increases the demand for the other good. Due to this effect, an increase in wage makes housework costlier for the male respondent. Because marital gains can be derived from complementarities, the wife decreases her time allocated to nonmarket work as well.

For example, doing housework together enhances marital relations through shared experiences. This also provides an avenue for spouses to understand each other's attitudes, values, and preferences, which are valuable information in a repeated game such as marriage. This is consistent with Hamermesh

(2000) who showed that couples in the United States prefer to simultaneously consume leisure and Hallberg (2003) who found that spouses in Sweden deliberately organize the timing of their leisure so that it can be enjoyed by the couples at the same time.

2. Female respondents' wage positively affects husbands' time devoted to housework. This is not consistent with the complementarity result above. This can be explained by the prevailing idea that the Philippine society is egalitarian (Medina 1995) and by the shifting dynamics of gender roles among households and in the labor market. Typical of egalitarian households, wives and husbands are key decisionmakers on household issues in the

Philippines. Bayudan (2006), for example, documents that it is a widespread practice among Filipino couples to consult with each other in every aspect of household issues, and in some cases, wives are documented to be the final decisionmakers. In the labor market, women are participating more in response to the evolving environments that call for women's increasing involvement outside of home. Evidence now shows that women are robustly employed in the services sector, particularly in the banking, finance, and insurance and business services subsectors. However, it also reveals labor market discrimination against women in the Philippines. The Asian Development Bank (2013) documents that women are more likely to be in vulnerable employment, and they have significantly lower employment rates than men. In addition, the gender wage gap that considers human capital gender differences is between 23 percent and 30 percent, an indication of high gender inequality.

Given this backdrop, the female's wage increases may be interpreted as a manifestation of success in the labor market and the increase in the husband's housework hours is a way to support her career. This is egalitarian in the sense that husbands may place a premium on their wives' success in the labor market, which is still marked by significant gender inequality. The complementarity result is also consistent with the egalitarian idea in that wives make choices that can best serve the interest of their marriages. In the male respondent-wife pair, wives can afford to lower their housework

hours possibly due to the favorable labor market conditions that men enjoy in the Philippine labor market.


### Recommendations

1. The government should find diverse and effective ways through which it can support women's participation in economically productive endeavors. After all, women comprise 50 percent of the country's population and have an equal role to play in steering the country toward sustainable growth. Data from the Global Entrepreneurship Research Association (2017) indicate that 30 percent more females than males are currently engaged in running an enterprise. With this, the government should address issues on micro, small, and medium enterprises such as access to credit and technical skills, and sustaining and upscaling of enterprises. It should also provide infrastructure support such as farm-to-market roads and fast and affordable access to information technology to aid their visibility in the local and global markets.
2. The government should address issues that severely increase the time outside of home and reduce family members' interaction. These include poor road conditions, such as potholes, floods resulting from poor drainage system, ill-planned constructions of buildings, and parked vehicles on thoroughfares and *Mabuhay* lanes, that lead to congestion. Likewise, it needs to resolve the reliability of mass transport system and issues on building the common station for Manila Metro Rail Transit Lines 3 and 7 and Manila Light Rail Transit Line 1.

3. To support parents who work, the government should explore the provision of day-care and tutorial services at affordable costs to ensure that children are getting good supplementary care. Postnatal initiatives, such as longer maternity leave benefits, provide opportunities to improve family dynamics in a very positive way.

4. A four-day work week can help improve the time allocation in households where both spouses work.

5. The legislative initiative to undertake tax reforms is projected to increase household's after-tax income, which can allow households to allocate resources to activities that enhance the balance between work and family life. Households will be able to afford good day-care services or get helpers from trustworthy agencies, for example.

6. The government should also move to increase the protection of workers in the informal sector, who are seldom covered by labor market policies and regulations intended for formal sector workers. 

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