

# Parenthood and the Gender Division of Domestic Labour in Germany

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## ***Abstract:***

*The study at hand focuses on the division of domestic duties between men and women. Distinguishing essentially between routine housework and parental duties, we lend special attention to the impact of parenthood on the division of labour in the home. The empirical investigations are based on descriptive and multivariate analyses of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) for Germany. We find that the division of domestic labour in Germany still shows a high level of traditionalism. Particularly having children does not only result in the women becoming the primary caregiver but also tends to shift routine housework towards a more traditional male breadwinner female carer template. This division of labour in the home retains its traditionalism even in contexts, where women show a stronger labour market attachment and higher income levels, though we observe slight shifts towards a somewhat more egalitarian division of labour particularly regarding routine housework in contexts where women are in a relatively sound economic position compared to the man.*

*Keywords: Division of Housework, Parenthood, Childcare, Gender Roles.*

## ***1) Introduction***

The share of female labour force participation as compared to men has profoundly increased in advanced industrialized societies during the last decades. However, this fundamental social change left the gender division of housework widely unaffected. To this day, domestic labour remains essentially a female domain, while male contributions in the household are clearly limited. Although, deviations from this traditional model exist – across societies as well as across social groups – the division of housework is remarkably reluctant to shifts towards more gender equity. It is even assumed that the largest bottlenecks to gender equality in society are the continuing organization of families by gender (especially the assignment of child-rearing responsibility to women), and the resistance of men to take over traditionally female activities in the family and workplace (see England 2006).

In front of the outlined background, the aim of this paper is to focus on key factors that underlie the gender division of labour in the household. Firstly, we investigate the impact of gender role attitudes, time constraints, and relative resources on the division of domestic labour and childcare in couples; Secondly, we do so by paying special attention to the impact of the transition to parenthood on the division of domestic labour and childcare. Our analysis focuses on the continental-conservative welfare state of Germany. This setting provides a sound basis for our analysis as in this country contradictions are quite salient: On one side norms of egalitarian gender roles have profoundly affected this society (see Fuwa 2004), whereas on the other side the division of domestic labour between men and women is still characterized by a great deal of traditionalism. Moreover, Germany is an interesting case because even 18 years after reunification there are distinct regional variations across Germany, concerning the transition to parenthood, gender role attitudes, and social conditions – most notably the provision of public childcare –that affect the reconciliation of work and family life. Therefore, we hypothesize that the impact, gender attitudes, available time budgets, and resources of women and men exert on the division of housework varies between East and West Germany. In detail, we assume that these differences result in a less traditional division of domestic labour after childbirth in East Germany (see also Cooke 2006).

The empirical analyses are based on the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) for Germany, conducted by the German Federal Institute for Population Research.

Basing our population of analysis on about 6,000 adult men and women, this representative data set provides a sound basis for the investigation of our research questions as it offers a broad array of items on gender role attitudes, family formation, and detailed information on the participation in market work and on contributions to housework and childcare. As similar surveys of the GGS have been carried out in many other European countries as well as in the USA, Canada, Japan, and Australia, this offers tremendously rich opportunities to develop a cross-national comparative perspective of the gender division of housework and childcare in later research.

### ***Research Findings and Theoretical Outline***

Although male contributions in domestic labour have been constantly increasing in recent decades, female responsibilities in the household still clearly exceed that of men (see Geist 2005; Fuwa 2004). This asymmetry is related to two general effects. Firstly, available time for household chores is higher among women due to a weaker labour market attachment, compared to men *ceteris paribus*. However, even in contexts, where female occupational engagement is higher than that of their spouses, women on average spend more time for household work than men do. This is related to the dominance of gender roles that persistently prescribe the majority of household chores as female responsibilities (see Bittman, England, Folbre, Sayer & Matheson 2003). Moreover, different types of domestic labour can be distinguished by gender segregated chores (see Noonan 2001). While technical and mechanical duties are male dominated, cooking, or cleaning, e.g., and most importantly childcare are normatively defined as female duties responsibilities in most modernized societies (see Hook 2007).

Such gender specific chores are closely related to traditional gender roles that assign the role of the prime carer to women while men are primarily addressed as breadwinners (see Lewis 1992). This is also reflected in various research findings that stress the central role of birth of the first child in changing the household division of labour towards a distinctively more traditional model (see Künzler, Walter, Reichart & Pfister 2001; Gille & Marbach 2004; Geist 2007). Female carer duties in that case also trigger a change in areas of domestic duties beyond parental chores like cleaning, shopping or cooking. This is particularly important, as the transition to parenthood in that context plays a key role in shifting the today common oc-

cupational focus of women (see McDonald 2000) towards a focus on the homemaker role in a context of a gender specific division of labour between household and market work. In contrast, where women retain their close labour market attachment, the division of domestic labour tends to remain more egalitarian (see Stier & Lewin-Epstein 2000; Klaus & Steinbach 2002).

In Germany, such a shift towards a traditional model is encouraged by institutional regulations like taxation that favours single earner couples, limitations in childcare infrastructure, or leave policies that primarily address female carer duties and widely neglect the fathers' role. However, such institutional contexts need to be interpreted in front of a cultural background that defines gender roles in general and female carer duties in particular. Especially in Germany, this interaction between cultural and institutional contexts tends to reproduce traditional gender roles that have a strict normative grounding. In this context, the perspective on the East of Germany shows interesting patterns of the institutional orientation of the GDR that still echoes almost two decades after the fall of the wall. This patterning is associated with a higher labour market attachment of mothers, what is not only consequence of a better childcare infrastructure but also related to somewhat more egalitarian gender roles. (see Rosenfeld, Trappe & Gornick 2004). Nevertheless, a cross-national perspective reveals that even in rather egalitarian societies, female contributions in the household, still clearly exceed the male share of the domestic burdens, particularly if a couple has children (see Fuwa 2004). Moreover, it has been noted that with respect to parental duties, men primarily engage in so-called pleasure activities, while women take over the majority of common childcare responsibilities. Aside from rather general explanations of predominant traditional gender norms, England (2006) notes that those domestic duties that are typically ascribed as being female generate low levels of social approval, and men instead focus on higher appreciated occupational duties.<sup>1</sup>

The theoretical framework of our analysis is based on a theory of action where the division of housework and childcare is subject to rational decisions. We assume individual gender role attitudes as well as internalized norms of traditionalism, and egalitarianism respectively to af-

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, it should also be noted that gender segregation in the labour market runs along similar lines, with occupations that correspond to domestic female (carer) duties generally are primarily female dominated, and commonly associated with below average wages.

fect the relevant processes of decision-making. As the division of housework is furthermore a consequence of the choices and actions of two partners, we also consider the status of the respective other. Following a framework of relative resources, we assume that the negotiation process concerning the division of housework and childcare is affected by the individual bargaining position of each actor. Thus, individual resources such as available income and human capital investments are depicted in relation to the other partner. Specific attention is also lent to the role of time availability in order to further elaborate how women and men respectively perform in the household given limitations in their time budget. From a life course perspective, the transition to parenthood will receive major analytical attention. We will thoroughly investigate the effect of parenthood on the division of domestic work and childcare between women and men and we will do so considering varying constraints and different sub-populations, given differences in labour market integration, human capital, union duration, and particularly in gender role attitudes. Additionally, we will analyze how different stages in the biographical planning of parenthood affect the division of domestic labour in couples. For that reason, we will distinguish between couples that have not formulated any childbearing plans, unions with manifest childbearing plans, and recent parents.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, it should be noted that regarding life-course related developments in the gender specific division of domestic labour, we have to resort to group comparisons within our sample, as the GGS does not provide longitudinal data, required for detailed analysis on the individual level.

Summarizing the theoretical elaborations, we will outline a series of hypothesis as focus for the ensuing empirical analysis.

*H1: Hypothesis of Gender Specific Chores:* Women and men do not only differ with respect to the total amount domestic contributions. Moreover, within household duties, gender specific chores can be distinguished. Childcare remains a clearly female dominated chore.

*H2: Childbirth Hypothesis:* Childbirth goes hand in hand with a series of unalienable female burdens. Particularly the arrival of the first child in this context triggers a more tradi-

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<sup>2</sup> Finally only the distinction between childless couples and parents yields significant results. Therefore, we gave up distinguishing between couples with and without childbearing plans.

tional division of labour in the household beyond imminent maternal responsibilities. This is particularly the case where the institutional background aggravates work-family conflicts and encourages traditional gender roles as in Germany.

*H3: Institutionalisation Hypothesis:* Partnership duration increases the likelihood for marriage. With this legally framed union, a shift towards a more traditional division of domestic labour distinguishes marriages from more egalitarian consensual unions, as traditional gender roles in marriages are encouraged by both social norms and social policy arrangements.

*H4: Relative Resource Hypothesis:* Women with higher skill endowments and a more profound labour market integration are capable to influence the negotiation over domestic duties in their favour. This is derived from the fact that more career oriented women have more narrow time budgets and they can infer a greater bargaining power due to their higher skill endowments, higher income, and options outside the partnered dyad.

## ***Design of the Empirical Analysis***

### ***Data Basis***

The quantitative empirical analyses are based on the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) for Germany. This representative data set provides a sound basis for the investigation of our research questions as it offers a broad array of items on gender role attitudes, family formation, and detailed information on the participation in market work and on contributions to housework and childcare. Of particular value for our purpose are the highly differentiated items referring to specific tasks within housework and childcare, which allow for meaningful distinctions in our dependent variables, the division of domestic labour in various duties, and particularly in childcare. Currently, the analysis of GGS data is limited to cross-sectional data only. Therefore, we attempt to elaborate the role of changes across the life course, such as the impact of transition to parenthood on the division of domestic tasks, by investigating how selected subgroups participate in housework and childcare given otherwise similar contextual factors.

Our population of analysis consists of 6,199 men and women, aged 18 to 79 years of age, living in marriages or consensual unions. Same sex couples (n=95) have been excluded from the analysis. An important limitation of the GGS data that should be stressed is that within couples only one respondent was interviewed, providing proxy information on his/her significant other. This provides some limits for our empirical analysis. Therefore, we conducted all analyses for female and male respondents separately.

The empirical analyses consist of three central steps: **First**, a factor score analysis is applied to generate the dependent variable. In the GGS, thirteen different types of domestic duties were asked (among others, cooking, doing the dishes, shopping, cleaning, repairs, finances, organising social activities). More specifically, six of these tasks relate to parental duties, including dressing the child, taking the child to bed, care for the sick child, spending leisure time with the child, helping with homework, and taking the child to specific events. While the contribution at hand puts the focus clearly on the division of parental duties between men and women, the remaining household chores will also be considered, as we assume that children in the household also introduce a change towards a more traditional division of labour in the other areas.

The result of the factor score analysis provides us with four central types of domestic duties, namely *routine housework* (cooking, dishes, cleaning, shopping), *repairs*, as well as *finances & organisation*. All child related chores amount to *parental duties*.

**Second**, we have intensely investigated in descriptive analyses, to which extent either male or female contributions dominate in these basic areas of domestic duties. Key results will be outlined in the following paragraph.

**Third**, we apply multivariate analyses in order to unravel the role of various constraints in determining gender differences in the division of parental duties, particularly with focus on the hypotheses, outlined above. The dependent variables in the multivariate models are based on the results of the factor score analysis. In this context for each of the central household chores (routine housework, repairs, finances, and parental duties) the indicator, derived from the factor loads has been standardized in order to display gender specific engagement in a specific area. Hence, the dependent variable varies along a continuous scale between 0 and 1 with “0” indicating that the responsibilities are taken over solely by the woman and “1” indi-

cating that the specific duties are carried out by the man. A value of 0.5 means that men and women share the domestic burdens equally in a specific area.

The multivariate estimates will rely on this indicator as a dependent variable. We apply an ordinary least squares model (OLS) with:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1\chi_1 + \beta_2\chi_2 + \dots + \beta_k\chi_k + \varepsilon \quad (1.1)$$

The application of the OLS model relies in the existence of a linear relation between co-variated and dependent variable (i.e., the division of parental contributions within the couple), which we assume to be approximatively justified given our set of covariates and the dependant variable. Moreover, OLS estimates require a normal distribution of the dependant variable. While certainly women take over the majority of parental burdens, conducted sensitivity tests could show that for the division of parental labour – although the distribution is slightly left skewed – an approximation with a normal distribution is justified.

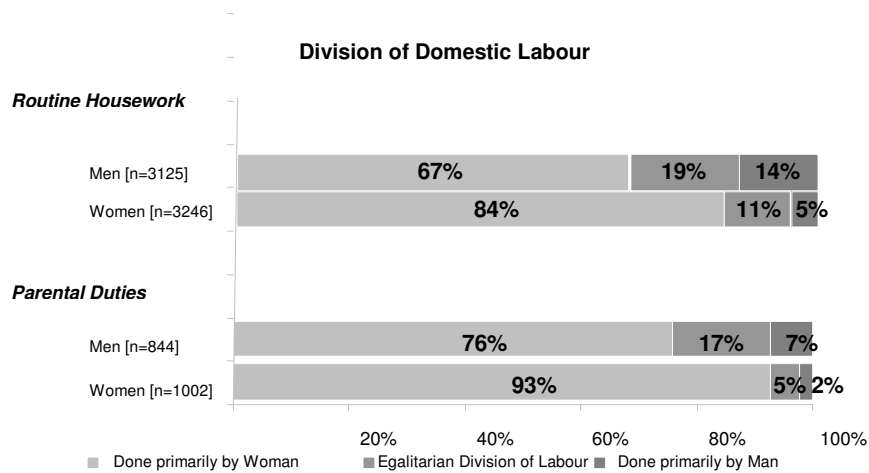
In applying these methods, we estimate separate models for men and women as we assume that the factors driving male and female contributions in parental duties differ, and that similar factors are likely to differ in their impact on men and women, as for example labour force participation. More generally, the multivariate analyses aim to shed light on the interrelations among individual resources, labour market integration, gender role attitudes, and union duration in determining women's and men's contribution to housework and childcare. Moreover, we also consider vital characteristics of the significant other in the individual-specific multivariate estimates. This follows the assumption that the division of parental burdens is also based on the actors capabilities and resources like time budgets on one side, but also on the ability to pass on certain responsibilities as consequence of a higher bargaining power. For that means, we apply a measure of relative income in the empirical model. Furthermore, we consider indicators of gender role beliefs, the number of children, migrational background, and religious denomination.



## Descriptive Evidence

This section provides some initial descriptive evidence of our analysis. An initial view shows that with exception of repairs in the household, the majority of domestic labour is carried out by women. Moreover, when compared to routine housework and other chores the division of parental care shows by far the most traditional distribution of duties with women taking the vast majority of burdens. This initial result is well in line with previous research on that issue (see, e.g., Geist 2005).

**Table 1:** Division of Routine Housework and Parental Duties by Gender – Descriptive Results



Source: GGS (authors' calculations).

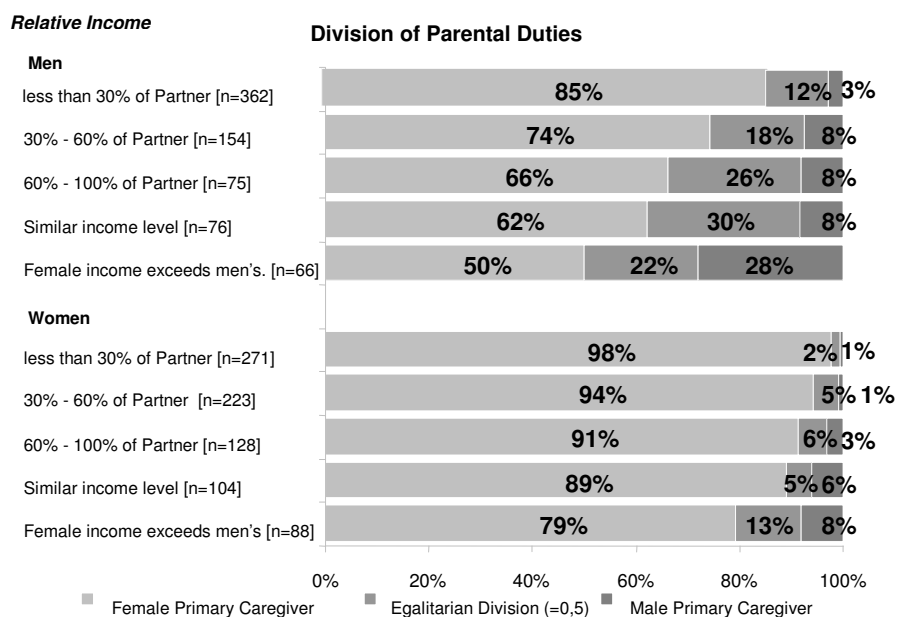
An interesting result is that the share of contributions, reported by women is generally higher than that of men. For example with respect to routine housework, 67% of all men respond that this duty is taken primarily by their female partners. In contrast, 84% of all women respond that they primarily take over these chores. This incongruence in male and female responses regarding the taking of domestic responsibilities has been related to an overestimation of individual domestic contributions of both men and women (see, e.g., Kamo 2000).

Regarding differences in the division of domestic duties across age groups, we find that particularly younger couples up to age 32 show a more egalitarian division of routine housework. However, as we have to rely on cross-sectional data, we are not able to distinguish changes in younger cohorts from age effects that lead to a more traditional division of labour within higher age groups. These older age groups contain a higher proportion of persons that

already have performed central life-course transitions – particularly the one to parenthood – that tend to have a traditionalising effect on the division of domestic responsibilities. Importantly, however, we do not find significant differences across age groups in the division of *parental duties* with women taking the vast majority of chores across all age groups. This provides a first hint that the transition to parenthood does indeed exert a traditionalising effect on the division of domestic duties.

Further information in that direction is provided by the duration of living together. Our descriptive results show that routine housework tends to get more traditionally divided with a longer duration of the union (see also Schulz & Grunow 2007). Moreover, a strong traditionalizing effect distinguishes marital from consensual unions, whereby women offer by far more contributions in routine housework after marriage (see also Bianchi 2000; Stier & Lewin-Epstein 2007). Reasons can certainly be found in incentives in German institutional arrangements that tend to favour marital unions with a single earner through taxation and leave policies. Yet, as we rely on bivariate descriptive evidence, we cannot directly distinguish the traditionalising impact of having a child. Yet, the results show no distinct traditionalising effect in parental duties over the course of a relationship. This suggests that it is primarily the transition to parenthood – that has a higher likelihood to occur with a longer union duration – that causes the woman to take over more domestic duties (aside from maternal care) rather than the duration of the relationship itself.

**Table 2:** Division of Parental Duties by Relative Income of Men and Women



*Source: GGS (authors' calculations).*

A final focus of the descriptive statistics will investigate the impact of available individual income. This indicator on one side indirectly reflects time spend for gainful employment, thus reducing available time for domestic chores. On the other side, a relatively higher income of one partner also reflects his or her ability to influence negotiations over the taking of domestic responsibilities in one's favour. Indeed, with an increasing share of joint income, women tend to contribute less in both routine housework *and* in parental duties. Nevertheless, both men and women report that female contributions are clearly higher than male ones are. This relation remains prevalent even if the woman's income exceeds the man's income. That is, even in a context where the woman likely has to carry a higher burden of occupational time investments and where her bargaining power exceeds that of the man, traditional gender roles place the higher burdens of both contributions in housework and parental care on female shoulders.

### ***Multivariate Findings***

The multivariate results rely on separate estimates for men and for women with respect to the perceived division of domestic labour. The results of the estimates on both men and women consistently show that among parents routine housework tends to be more traditionally distributed than among yet childless couples. Central results are provided with Table 3 (see Appendix).

The multivariate findings put some results of the descriptive analysis into a different light. Importantly the division of routine housework becomes more traditional the more children life in the household. However, the number of children does not show any significant impact on parental duties. This means that childcare and associated parental responsibilities are primarily a female domain from the birth of the first child on. In contrast, women tend to focus more on a sole homemaker role (as expressed in the significant impact of a higher number of children on a traditional division of routine housework), the higher the parental burdens due to family size.

Moreover, the transition into marriage also exerts a more traditionalising impact on the division of domestic labour. That is, with the step to the institutionalisation of the partnership the share of domestic responsibilities becomes less egalitarian, with respect to both routine housework and childcare. This effect remains significant even after controlling for the existence and number of children. In contrast to what was speculated in the descriptive analyses this means that the transition into marriage itself exerts a traditionalising impact, regardless of the often confounded transition to parenthood. One reason for this traditionalising impact might be that the higher level of legal protection of women within marriages contains some of the risks of economic dependence, associated with the primary focus on a homemaker role and a curtailment of occupational engagement. Another reason, however, might be that the transition into marriage marks a progression on life paths – particularly towards parenthood – which couples generally anticipate to be difficult to reconcile with egalitarian domestic and occupational roles, given traditional caretaker norms and institutional arrangements, which are prevalent in Germany.

With respect to changes in the division of domestic labour across the life-course, our results require a cautious interpretation. As we rely on cross-sectional data, reliable evidence on that issue remains unavailable with our study. However, in distinguishing across age groups, we do not find the most traditional division of domestic labour among the oldest age group (49 years of age and above), what we would expect, given that gender roles slowly tend towards more egalitarianism over the course of social change (see Fuwa 2004). In fact, the division of domestic duties is most traditional within the middle age group (32 to 48 years of age). This group has the highest likelihood to be in the early to middle stages of family formation with immense constraints particularly on female time budgets. Thus, with all due caution in interpreting these findings, there appears to be a life-course effect in a particularly traditional division of labour during the early phases of starting a family. For a further discussion of a tendency towards generally more egalitarian division of household chores, the available cross sectional data remains unsuited.

With focus on the labour market status of both men and women, we find that any departure from the prevalent picture of the sole male breadwinner model leads to a more egalitarian division of contributions in the home. This impact is particularly pronounced if the woman becomes the prime earner of a family what might be the case due to male unemployment, inac-

tivity or due to a reversal of traditional gender roles (which, however, is a comparatively rare status in Germany). This offers a close link to the relevance of the time-availability approach (see Coverman 1985), according to which women with occupational responsibilities simply have to restrict their engagement in the home due to a limited time budget. Moreover, we find that also after including the relative income of men and women, both labour force status and income retain a significant impact towards a more egalitarian division of routine housework *and* parental duties. This means that a pronounced occupational engagement of the women does not only hamper her domestic contributions by curtailing available time but also suggests that her improved economic position is supportive of providing an improved bargaining position to encourage male domestic contributions.

If we focus on gender roles, we find that these attitudes of men and women play a central part in determining both routine housework and parental duties. Yet, it should be stressed that egalitarian gender role attitudes do not result in an equal division of domestic burdens but rather result in a shift of the – particularly in Germany – highly traditional status quo towards a somewhat higher share of male contributions in housework and care. Nevertheless, the dominant picture that remains is that even in more egalitarian oriented couples, women provide the majority of housework and particularly of childcare.

## ***Summary & Conclusion***

Compared to routine housework and other chores the division of parental care shows by far the most traditional distribution of duties with women taking the vast majority of burdens. This may in fact be the result of a selection effect in our analysis. Relying on cross-sectional data from the GGS, we are not able to observe the changes associated with the transition to parenthood. Yet, the difference in the extent of traditionalism in parental duties, compared to other household chores is immense. Hence, it is far more likely that the transition to parenthood exerts a traditionalising effect on the division of domestic labour rather than the selection assumption of couples with a traditional division of labour having a higher likelihood to start a family. This line of reasoning is also compatible with German institutional arrangements that favour a reproduction of norms of maternal care and that encourage a female retreat from the labour force and a focus on caregiver duties through social policy incentives.

The central finding of the study at hand is that the division of domestic labour between German men and women is still far from being egalitarian. Women still take over the majority of routine housework and particularly of parental responsibilities. Particularly the birth of the first child exerts a strong traditionalising effect also on routine household chores like cleaning or cooking that were previously more equally distributed between man and woman. Furthermore, a traditionalising effect on shared duties can also be traced to the institutionalisation of the union and a longer duration of the relationships. In contrast, a higher share of female contribution to joint income and a higher female labour market attachment tends to skip the traditional status quo towards a more egalitarian division of labour. Last but not least, this is the case as the associated occupational engagement curtails female time budgets but also because it improves female options outside the partnered dyad, improving bargaining position and capping economic dependence from a breadwinner. Yet even in contexts where women are in a position to reduce their share of domestic responsibilities, they still carry the major burdens of housework and particularly of parental duties. Traditional gender roles in Germany retain a level of relevance that still addresses women as primary caregivers and contributors to housework even in contexts where responsibilities and options outside the household allow a change towards a slightly more egalitarian division of domestic labour.

## Appendix

**Table 3:** Determinants of the Division of Parental Duties –  
OLS-Regression Estimates for Men and Women

Parental Duties [0 – Carried out by Woman; 1 – Carried out by Man]		Men		Women	
		B	Standard- Error	B	Standard- Error
<i>(Constant)</i>		0,049	0,069	0,011	0,051
Age of Respondent		0,000	0,001	0,000	0,001
Living in West Germany		0,001	0,023	-0,019	0,016
Migrant		0,041	0,020	0,026	0,016
Religious Attachment		0,000	0,004	-0,001	0,003
Consensual Union		0,062*	0,026	0,034*	0,017
Number of Children		-0,004	0,008	-0,002	0,006
Duration of Living Together		0,001	0,002	0,003*	0,001
<i>Male/ Female Employ- ment Re- lation</i>	Both not Working	<b>0,163***</b>	<b>0,028</b>	<b>0,081***</b>	<b>0,021</b>
	Woman Prime Earner	<b>0,305***</b>	<b>0,033</b>	<b>0,196***</b>	<b>0,031</b>
	Other	0,196***	0,052	0,150**	0,049
	<i>Reference: Male Breadwinner / Female Homemaker</i>	-	-	-	-
	Man: Full-time Employed / Woman Part-time	0,067***	0,018	0,055***	0,013
	Both Working Full-time	0,140***	0,026	0,082***	0,017
<i>Missing Dummy</i>		-0,046	0,088	0,001	0,057
<i>Male/ Female Educa- tional Relation</i>	Both Low Level of Education	-0,033	0,020	-0,022	0,018
	Woman. Rel. Higher Education	-0,053*	0,023	-0,016	0,017
	<i>Reference: Man Rel. Higher Education</i>	-	-	-	-
	Equal Level of Education	-0,019	0,019	0,010	0,015
<i>Missing Dummy</i>		0,003	0,124	0,008	0,081
<i>Relative Income: Increasing Share of Woman's Income on Joint Income</i>		0,002	0,005	0,009*	0,004
External Childcare Support		0,006	0,015	0,027*	0,011
Egalitarian Gender Role Attitudes		0,048***	0,011	0,032***	0,008
<b>n:</b>		<b>644</b>		<b>958</b>	
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>:</b>		<b>0,268</b>		<b>0,136</b>	
<b>Effect coefficients significant on basis of : * p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01 &amp; *** p ≤ 0.001.</b>					
<b>Bold Print: Significant Difference between Estimates for Men and Women (two-sided t-test).</b>					

*Source: GGS, Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung (authors' calculations).*

### Notes for Table 3:

- Method: Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression.
- Dependent variable “Division of Parental Duties” coded on a 0/1 continuum with 0 if responsibilities are taken solely by the woman and 1 if taken solely by the man
- Coding of the dependent variable is based on the factor score analysis as outlined on p.7.

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