How has COVID19 Changed Parents’ Division of Domestic Labor in the U.S.?

Richard J. Petts, Ball State University
Daniel L. Carlson, University of Utah
Joanna R. Pepin, University at Buffalo, SUNY
COVID19 and Domestic Labor

• Dramatic Changes for Families
  • Closing of schools, childcare centers, and domestic service providers
  • Increase in unemployment and telecommuting, reductions in work hours

• Opportunity to test theories on gendered division of labor
  • Relative resources, time availability, gender perspective

• How has the division of, and time spent in, domestic labor changed for mothers and fathers?
  • Does this vary by fathers’ length of leave?
COVID19: Exacerbating Gender Inequality

- Gender perspective
  - Uncertainty of pandemic may lead couples to adhere to traditional gender norms

- Time availability and relative resource hypotheses
  - Women more likely to lose job during pandemic
  - Women more likely to reduce work hours during pandemic

- Autonomy theory
  - Inability to outsource domestic labor may thrust these tasks back onto mothers
COVID19: Reducing Gender Inequality

• Gender perspective
  • Most men disagree with notion of separate spheres ideology and support a more egalitarian arrangement

• Time availability hypothesis
  • Reduced workplace barriers to involvement at home
  • Increased time at home due to telecommuting, greater access to paid leave, limited travel and leisure options
Domestic Labor and Fathers’ Leave-Taking

• Fathers’ leave-taking and domestic labor
  • Taking longer leaves associated with greater housework and childcare over time
  • Fewer workplace barriers may enable these fathers to be even more involved

• Exposure to domestic labor among fathers who did not take leave
  • Consistent with time availability hypothesis, greater time at home may reduce gaps in domestic labor between fathers who do not take leave and those who do
Data

• Online survey conducted in April 2020 through Prolific
  • U.S. parents who reside with a spouse/partner and a biological child
  • N = 1,157 after data quality checks
  • Excluded respondents with gender other than male/female and same-sex couples
    • Final sample size = 1,025

• Estimates weighted to be representative of co-resident American parents on gender, age, race/ethnicity
  • Sample comparable with national estimates on many sociodemographic characteristics
  • College-educated parents, parents with no religious affiliation overrepresented
Domestic Labor

- Housework: meal preparation, laundry, grocery shopping, dishes, cleaning
- Childcare (age specific, asked about youngest child): physical care, talking/listening to child, looking after child, putting child to bed, read, playing, organizing, enforcing rules, attending events, picking up/dropping off, helping with homework

Respondents reported on division of domestic labor before and during pandemic
- Mother/father does all, mother/father does more, shared equally
- Mean scales for housework and childcare, then create categories for mother does majority (>60%), shared equally (each partner does 40-60%), father does majority (>60%)

Respondents reported on how time in domestic tasks changed for them and their partner since the pandemic
- Doing much less/more, somewhat less/more, no change
- Combined estimates for mothers and fathers; Mean scales for housework and childcare, then create categories for father/mother doing more, father/mother doing less, and no change
Fathers’ Leave-Taking and Controls

• Focus on length of time taken off work for birth of youngest child
  • No leave (44%)
  • 1 week or less (22%)
  • 2-3 weeks (22%)
  • One month or more (12%)

• Multivariate models include controls for:
  • employment status, household income, gender attitudes, job loss, whether either parent is essential worker, working from home, reduced work hours, childcare hours (pre-pandemic), creating e-learning content, age, race/ethnicity, marital status, religious affiliation, health, child age, number of children, education, timing of stay-at-home order (state-level)
Couples Sharing Domestic Labor Relatively Equally Before and During Pandemic

![Graph showing the comparison of couples sharing domestic labor before and during COVID-19. The graph compares housework and childcare, with bars indicating the percentage of labor shared.

- **Housework**: Before COVID-19, 27% of couples shared housework, and during COVID-19, 42% shared housework.
- **Childcare**: Before COVID-19, 45% of couples shared childcare, and during COVID-19, 56% shared childcare.

Legend: Before COVID19, During COVID19
Prevalence of Sharing Domestic Labor Relatively Equally, by Sociodemographic Characteristics
Change in Time Spent in Domestic Labor During Pandemic
Couples Sharing Domestic Labor Relatively Equally, by Fathers’ Length of Leave
Distribution of Housework During COVID19, by Leave-Taking
Other Key Findings

• Time availability and relative resources hypotheses
  • Parents did more domestic labor when they spent more time at home (unemployed or working from home)
  • Parents did more domestic labor when they earned less than their partners

• Gender perspective and autonomy theory
  • Loss of childcare led to increases in mothers’ time in domestic labor
Conclusions

• In the U.S., the pandemic is associated with both reduced and exacerbated gender inequalities in domestic labor
  • There has been an increase in couples who share housework and childcare relatively equally
  • In couples where mothers perform the majority of housework and childcare, their burdens have increased due to greater time spent in these tasks

• Couples are more likely to share domestic labor when fathers adhere to cultural norms of leave-taking (i.e., taking 1-3 weeks off when child is born)

• Findings support time availability and relative resources hypotheses as well as gender perspective