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**Article**

## Also on Sundays, women perform most of the housework and child care

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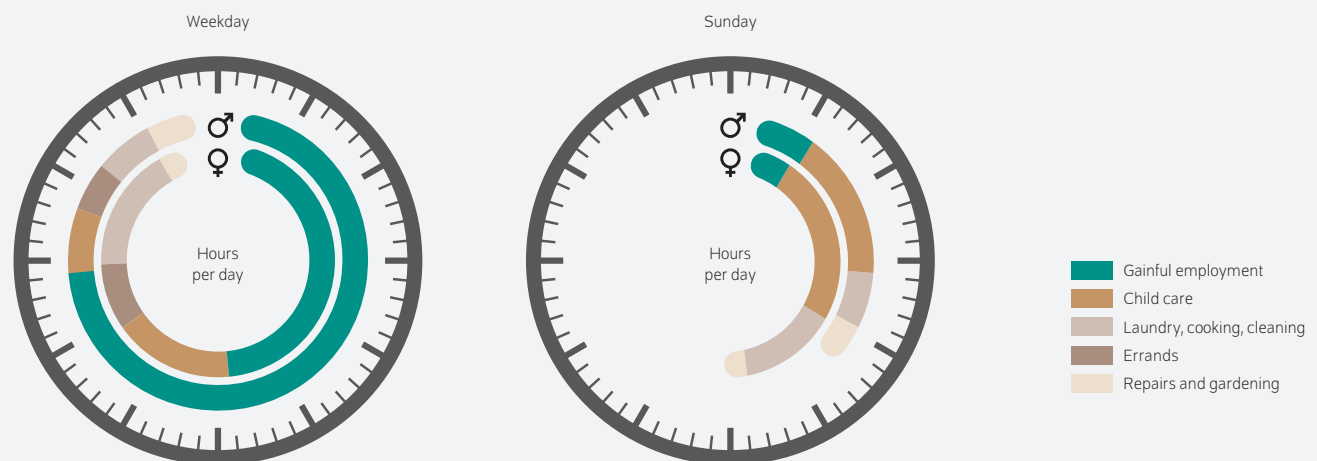
## Also on Sundays, women perform most of the housework and child care

By Claire Samtleben

- Women in couple households spend significantly more time doing unpaid housework and child care than men; men pursue gainful employment for more hours than women
- Unpaid work is not only unequally divided on working days, but also on work-free days and does not appear to be explained by time spent pursuing gainful employment
- Women are primarily responsible for work around the house that has to be done frequently and is time-inflexible
- Men tend to take on work that must be done infrequently and is time-flexible
- More partner months in the parental leave benefit would be one way to reduce the gender care gap and thereby contribute to reducing the extent to which women are financially worse off

### Men's and women's time use on weekdays and Sundays

In hours per day



Source: SOEP v33, own calculations.

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### FROM THE AUTHOR

*“The division of housework and child care between men and women is not only unequal on weekdays. On working days, the unequal distribution is often justified by the difference in the extent of gainful employment, but on Sundays this argument is unconvincing.”*

— Claire Samtleben —

# Also on Sundays, women perform most of the housework and child care

By Claire Samtleben

## ABSTRACT

Paid and unpaid work are still distributed very unequally between men and women in Germany. Regardless of time restrictions imposed by gainful employment, there is a gender-specific gap in time spent on housework and child care (gender care gap). The total volume of paid and unpaid work on weekdays is roughly the same for men and women (approx. 11 hours), although women perform more unpaid and men more paid work. Also on Sundays, women spend an average of 1.5 hours more on unpaid work, even though almost no gainful work is done—neither by women nor men. In households with children—especially, young children—the gender care gap is particularly wide. Since the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work negatively affects the financial situation of women, policy measures which support women's participation in the labor market and encourage men's participation in housework and child care are important. An example of the latter would be the extension of partner months for the parental leave benefit.

For over 100 years, International Women's Day has served as a reminder of lacking women's rights and persisting gender inequality. In 26 countries, March 8 is a legal holiday and it has become one in the city-state of Berlin this year. International Women's Day is typically an occasion for shining a spotlight on gender inequalities in the labor market, for example the *gender pay gap*.<sup>1</sup> A current *DIW Weekly Report* shows that the gender pay gap can partly be explained by the different amount of time that is spent on gainful employment, which again is gender-specific.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, we are examining the time spent on paid and unpaid work and their division in the context of couples based on data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) (see box).

## Men do little around the house despite increase in women's labor market participation

An examination of couple households over the past 25 years indicates that women's participation in the labor market is rising. While the employment rate of women in couple relationships was slightly over 60 percent in 1992, it was almost 80 percent in 2016 (see Figure 1). However, this statistic does not differentiate by type of employment, meaning whether women work full time or part time.

Very often, gainful employment is understood as equivalent to work in general. Unpaid work, such as managing a household and caring for (otherwise working) family members, children, and relatives in need of care, is less often associated with work. Other than *Equal Care Day*,<sup>3</sup> comparatively few publicity campaigns draw attention to the lack of appreciation for and unequal distribution<sup>4</sup> of such tasks between men and women. The unequal distribution of unpaid work has significant implications for the social and economic

<sup>1</sup> See Patricia Gallego Granados and Katharina Wrohlich, "Gender Pay Gap besonders groß bei niedrigen und hohen Löhnen," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 10 (2018): 173–179 (available online, accessed on February 20, 2019; this applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise).

<sup>2</sup> Aline Zucco, "Large Gender Gaps Correlate With the Non-Linearity in Earnings in Certain Occupations," *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 10 (2019).

<sup>3</sup> Initiated in 2016: Equal Care Day (available online)

<sup>4</sup> In a comparison of OECD countries regarding the distribution of unpaid household work between women and men, Germany ranked in the middle. See OECD, *Dare to Share: Germany's Experience Promoting Equal Partnership in Families* (2017) (available online).

Box

Database

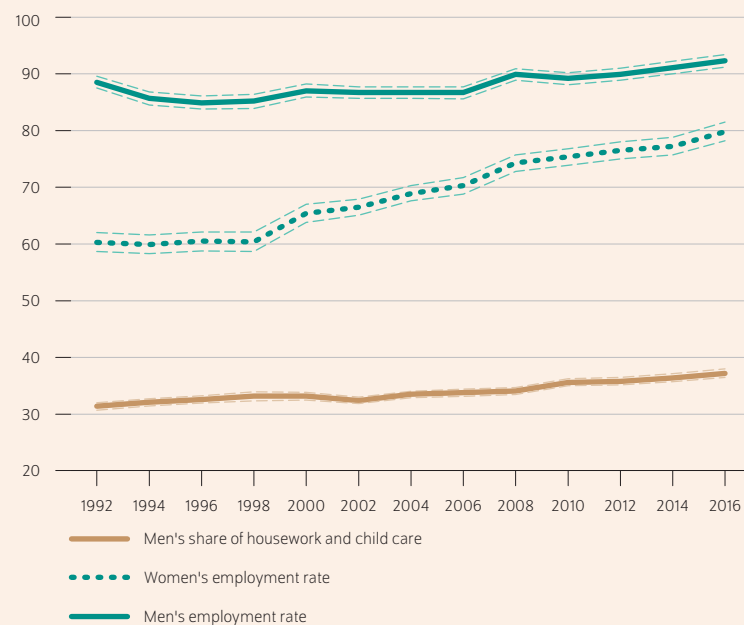
The database for this report is the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a longitudinal survey that has been carried out since 1984 in Germany. Based on this data, representative statements on the household and individual level can be made about various spheres of life such as work, education, and health. Every year, as standard procedure, the persons in the survey are asked how many hours they spend pursuing: gainful employment and unpaid work such as child care; housework such as doing the laundry, cooking, and cleaning; running errands and shopping; dealing with administrative tasks; making repairs; and working in the garden. Every other year, they are requested to answer these questions for Saturdays and Sundays as well. The trends in time spent on these activities are analyzed for couples in the 18–60 age group between 1992 and 2016; therefore the author was able to examine gender-specific changes over a period of 25 years. For 2015, (n=2741 couples), the time spent on unpaid and paid work on workdays and Sundays measured in hours was compared in order to show the difference in the gender care gap on workdays and largely work-free days.

participation and security of women performing the lion's share of housework and child care. This is partly because unpaid housework and child care are not subject to social insurance contributions. Even though the calculation for pension payments does take periods of child care into account, this closes the gender-specific gap in pensions only to a limited extent.<sup>5</sup>

While the employment level of women has steadily increased, men's proportion of housework and child care has risen only moderately. In 1992, men in couple relationships took care of less than one-third (31.4 percent) of the housework and child care on average; in 2016, the proportion had risen to 37.2 percent (see Figure 1). It is worthwhile to take a differentiated look at the trends in time-use in the housework segment (see Figure 2). The growing proportion of men's participation in such unpaid work is not due to their increased absolute level of involvement in the household. Instead, it is the result of women spending less and less time on housework and child care. According to our study, since the beginning of the 1990s the average number of hours that women spend cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and caring for children has steadily decreased. The time women spent on running errands has also steadily fallen. On the other hand, the amount of time that men spend with such unpaid tasks has remained comparatively small. In 1992, women spent around three hours of every workday cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry, and in 2016 the total time spent on these activities had

Figure 1

Employment and housework contribution over time  
In percent



Note: Men's proportion in Housework and childcare in couple relationships on weekdays (Monday to Friday); includes child care, errands, cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry, gardening and repairs around the house.

Source: SOEP v33, own calculations.

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While women's labor market participation rises constantly, men's participation in housework and childcare increases only slightly.

fallen to around two hours. In contrast, in 1992 men spent only 35 minutes a day on cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry—a much lower investment of time. In the past 25 years, the amount has risen to only 52 minutes.

Often, the asymmetrical division of paid and unpaid work is explained as the consequence of the model of “man as breadwinner”. Encouraged by tax incentives such as the system of joint taxation of married couples (*Ehegattensplitting*)<sup>6</sup> and insufficient public child care opportunities, this family model has established itself—particularly in western Germany. In 28 percent of couples, the man is the sole earner and in another 11 percent, the woman earns only additional income, working up to 15 hours a week.<sup>7</sup> Since the men in this earnings constellation are the principal earners and are gainfully employed for more hours than their partners, they have less time available to take care of unpaid work and their partners

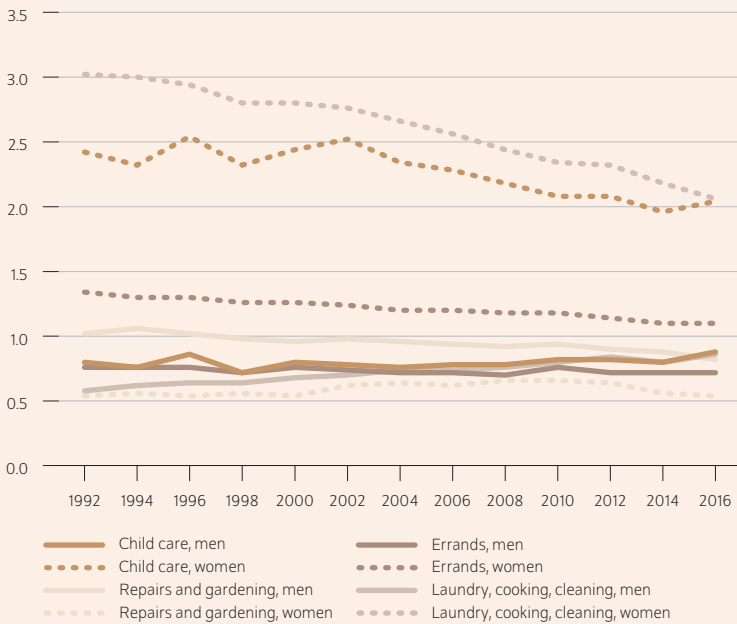
<sup>6</sup> For information on the negative incentives for women to participate in the labor market arising from splitting the difference in spousal income, see Kai-Uwe Müller et al., “Evaluationsmodul: Förderung und Wohlergehen von Kindern,” *DIW Berlin Politikberatung kompakt* no. 73 (2013) (available online).

<sup>7</sup> Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), *Familienreport 2017. Leistungen, Wirkungen, Trends*. 2017. 2008),

<sup>5</sup> Markus M. Grabka et al., “Der Gender Pension Gap verstärkt die Einkommensungleichheit von Männern und Frauen im Rentenalter”, *DIW Wochenbericht* no. 5 (2017): 87–96 (available online).

Figure 2

**Women's and men's time spent on unpaid work on weekdays**  
In hours per day



Note: Confidence intervals are not reported for reasons of visibility, mean differences are statistically significant.

Source: SOEP v33, own calculations.

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Women spend increasingly less time on housework, this drives men's proportional housework contribution—a purely statistical effect.

have more time. The underlying concept of this argument is called the *time availability approach*.<sup>8</sup>

It is not surprising that women who have part-time jobs perform significantly more unpaid work than their colleagues who work full time. Yet, women working full time also perform more unpaid work than their male colleagues who work full time.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the difference in time spent on unpaid work appears to be explained to some extent by the time restrictions that come with paid work. Following the logic of the time availability argument, housework and child care should only be divided by gender during the week: on the days when gainful employment is pursued. On free days, typically Sundays, this mechanism should not apply and the division of housework should be different.

<sup>8</sup> Shelley Coverman (1985): Explaining Husbands' Participation in Domestic Labor. *The Sociological Quarterly* 26 (1), 81–97.

<sup>9</sup> Dietmar Hobler, Svenja Pfahl, and Sandra Horvath, "Zeitaufwand für bezahlte und unbezahlte Arbeit im mittleren Lebensalter 2012/2013", WSI GenderDatenPortal (2013) (In German, available online).

**During the week, men and women have the same overall workload—but women do more unpaid work**

When investigating the total volume of paid and unpaid work, often the *double burden* concept<sup>10</sup> is used, which describes the double burden posed by gainful employment and housework. Looking at the overall volume of paid and unpaid work of men and women on workdays in our study, there are no substantial differences: men work 11 hours and 18 minutes every day and women work around 11 hours. But for men and women the composition of this total time worked is markedly different. Almost all activities show a typical gender-specific division. During the week, women spend five hours and 26 minutes on gainful employment; at eight hours and 38 minutes, men work significantly more in paid work. Men take care of children on weekdays for an average of 50 minutes and women do this for two hours. When it comes to errands and administrative activities, again, women invest more time than men, somewhat more than one hour a day in comparison to men's 40 minutes. The only area in which men invest more time in unpaid work are the garden and general repairs; they spend 37 minutes on a weekday against 28 minutes for women (see Figure 3). Women are primarily responsible for work around the house that has to be done frequently and must be done at a specific time, such as preparing dinner or picking up the children. Men tend to take on work that has to be done less frequently and not at specific times, such as mowing the lawn.

**For couples with (young) children, the differences in time use are the largest**

Inequality in the division of gainful employment and housework is even greater between men and women if the couple has children. This is most striking for couple households with small children aged up to six (see Figure 4). In couple households with children, the total time that must be spent on housework increases, as does the gender care gap. In couple households without children, women spend twice as much time cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry as their male partners during the week. Among couples whose youngest child is under seven years old, women spend three times as much time pursuing unpaid activities (two hours and 23 minutes vs. 47 minutes). Couples whose youngest child is between seven and 18 are somewhere in the middle. When it comes to gainful employment, the opposite can be observed: the male partner in couples with children under seven does five hours and six minutes more paid work a day than his partner. This gender gap is significantly larger than that of couples without children with men working one hour and 24 minutes more than women. For couples with children between seven and 18, the difference is three hours and 54 minutes. The "Family working time" model could be an incentive for a more equal division of gainful and

<sup>10</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild und Anne Machung (1989): *The Second Shift*. New York.

unpaid work.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, an extension of the partner months in the parental leave benefit would also be an opportunity to increase men’s involvement in child care and housework.<sup>12</sup>

**Even on Sundays, women do significantly more unpaid work**

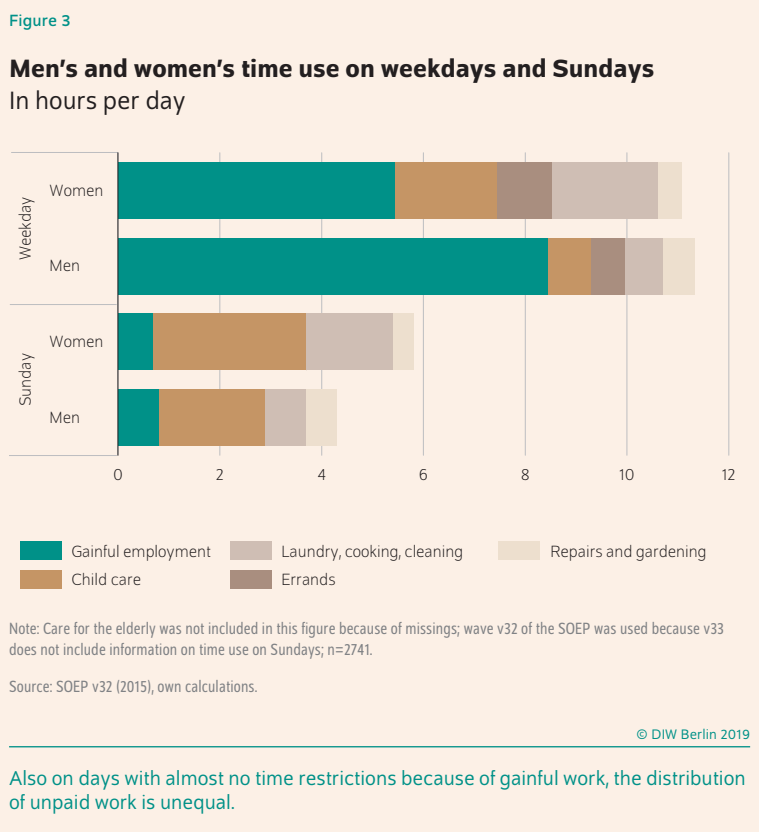
On Sunday, the day when people usually spend little or no time pursuing gainful employment, there is virtually no gender-specific, unequal distribution of (the minimal amount) of paid work. Women and men spend an average of 42 minutes (women) or 48 minutes (men) on gainful employment on Sundays. The picture is different with unpaid housework and child care. The division of child care (men two hours and six minutes, women three hours) is unequal, just as it is during the week. Women spend more than twice as much time as men doing laundry, cooking, and cleaning on Sundays (one hour and 42 minutes vs. 48 minutes). The argument that the unequal workload around the house is justified because men spend more time pursuing gainful employment is therefore unconvincing when it comes to work-free days. Most likely, other mechanisms on the level of social norms, bargaining, and routines are also at work.

In couple households, the time spent on housework and child care on Sundays has a similar pattern to that of weekdays. In couple households with young children, on Sundays women spend just under four hours on housework and child care (three hours and 54 minutes) more than their male partners. In couple households with older children (seven to 18), they still spend two hours and 48 minutes more. In couple households without children, the difference is 36 minutes. It is obvious that the time spent on unpaid work rises sharply during the week and on Sundays as well when young children are part of the household. Unlike weekdays, on which the sum of unpaid and paid work is approximately equal for men and women, women perform significantly more work on the days with traditionally little or no gainful employment.

Comparing workdays and Sundays clearly demonstrates that the unequal distribution of housework and child care cannot be fully explained by the unequal distribution of gainful employment. On weekdays, the time spent on gainful employment does indeed seem to play a role in the division of unpaid work. But the resulting patterns and routines acquired during weekdays appear to have a more far-reaching effect. Even on free days when women and men mainly abstain from pursuing gainful employment, a wide gender care gap exists. When children are part of couple households, the gender care gap is even wider. Particularly in the presence of very young children, women perform significantly more unpaid housework than men.

<sup>11</sup> Kai-Uwe Müller, Michael Neumann, and Katharina Wrohlich, "The 'Family Working-Time Benefits Model' (Familienarbeitszeit): Giving Mothers More Time for Work, Giving Fathers More Time for Family," *DIW Economic Bulletin* no. 45/46 (2015): 595–602 (available online).

<sup>12</sup> See Marcus Tamm, "Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and mothers' labor market participation," *Ruhr Economic Papers* no. 773 (2018).



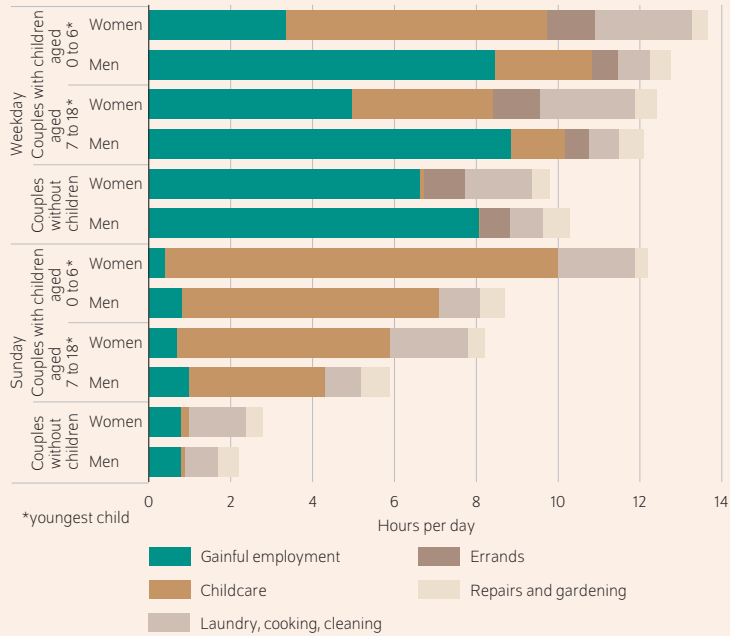
**Conclusions**

March 8 is an important day to bring existing gender inequalities to mind, address them aloud, and talk about solutions that would affect the overall fabric of society. Establishing International Women’s Day as a holiday is certainly a welcome gesture. But ultimately, it is nothing more than token politics that must not hide the fact that we still live in a society of vast gender inequality. The unequal distribution of unpaid work exists on free days as well as workdays and does not appear to be a direct result of time spent pursuing gainful employment—at least, not on free days. The role patterns and routines that dominate the weekdays continue to leave their mark on free days. Also on March 8 this year, women will do disproportionately more unpaid work.

The distribution of paid and unpaid work is only examined descriptively in this report. However, the preliminary findings indicate that the interplay of unequally distributed unpaid work and the labor market success of women and men deserve more attention. It is clear that due to the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work, women are systematically economically worse off than men. The distribution and use of time are key components of modern gender politics, albeit difficult to influence. Nonetheless, in order to reduce the gender care gap, unambiguous policy initiatives are needed. Men and women must be able to pursue gainful employment to the same extent, and men must take on more responsibility in the area of unpaid work. The constantly low level of participation among men in the household shows that a general transformation in cultural norms with regard to housework and child care is needed. Policy

Figure 4

**Time use of couples with and without children**  
In hours per day



Notes: Care for the elderly was not included in this figure because of missings; wave v32 of the SOEP was used because v33 does not include information on time use on Sundays; n=2741.

Source: SOEP v32 (2015), own calculations.

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The gender-specific distribution of paid and unpaid work is most pronounced in couples with small children.

reforms could support this cultural change, for example with the extension of the partner months in the parental leave benefit, which positively influence the involvement of fathers in child care and housework.

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