

Change and Continuity in Housework: U.S. Men and Women

Ping Li
Economics and Management College
South China Normal University
Guangzhou University Town
Guangzhou 510006 P R China

liping@umich.edu

Frank P. Stafford
Department of Economics
Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
48106 U S A

fstaffor@umich.edu

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ABSTRACT

Since 1983 as labor force participation rates and market hours have increased, the time commitment to routine housework by both married and single women (age 30-55) has declined by somewhat more. There has been some reduction in total work time for married women active in the labor market at the 25th, 50th, 75th and the 90th percentiles. We interpret these secular changes in the composition of work by women as shaped by reduced exclusion from a wide range of market occupations and, for younger women, accentuated by growth patterns arising from information technology. For married men active in the labor market, 2003-2015, total work hours have remained largely unchanged with modest declines at all percentile points. For 2003-2015 there has been a notable increase in the share of married men age 30-55 not active in the labor market. We do not interpret these recent changes as moves for men toward a voluntary increase in free time. Continuing future changes in the division of labor are suggested by panel analysis of younger adults and diary based measures for teenagers.

Keywords: Time Use, Labor Market Activity, Division of Labor

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Introduction

In recent work (Li and Stafford, 2017) we assess occupational mobility across the generations for both men and women. The share of those aged 30-55, as of 2013, in the fields in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) now exceeds the share of the 30-55 year olds in production occupations, a strong contrast with their parents, with one of seven fathers having been working in production¹. The emergent occupational patterns can be seen in the context of favorable unbalanced economic growth (Baumol, Batey-Blackman and Wolff, 1985) and changing patterns of exclusion (Bergmann, 1974). Has this growth been at the expense of a combined increase in time working in the market and everyday housework – often referred to as a ‘time squeeze’? Or has there been a continuation of a ‘leisure dividend’ from economic growth observed in prior decades?

For 30-55 year old women and men as of 2013 almost 45 percent of both men and women report their mothers to have been out of the labor force or homemakers when they were growing up². The broad transition to higher value activity than routine or core housework has led to economic growth for the working age population on the order of 23%. In combination with widening application of information technology³ this occupational transition away from non-market production may be considered as a continually outward shifting of aggregate supply, contributing to overall growth of family income and very low rates of inflation⁴.

As these younger generation women have far higher labor force participation rates and greater labor market hours in a wide range of market occupations what has

¹ Age 30-55 is chosen to avoid issues of education and early retirement.

² Of women not in the labor force as of 1983, regular housework averaged 1,739 hours per year.

³ In addition the technology has led to skill extensive technical change and a widening in the dispersion of individual labor income (Johnson and Stafford, 1998).

⁴ In a basic aggregate supply and demand framework low rates of U.S. inflation, 1995-2017, can be explained by an underlying technology based outward shift in aggregate supply and during the 2001 and 2008 recessions by an inward shift in aggregate demand. Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census indicate a rise in constant 2016 dollars average family income of \$65,655 in 1983 to \$90,335 in 2013 a gain of 38 percent (Federal Reserve Economic Data). This contrasts with the often reported lack of growth in real median wages of men.

happened to housework time⁵? Has the apparent economic growth occurred at a notable time cost? Have these women or their husbands become subject to a time squeeze where the combined hours of market time and routine housework are absorbing a rising share of waking time? What may we expect going forward in terms of total non-market time and its distribution within the family? For some clues on this future world we assess the changing housework time of young married and time diary estimates of the changing housework time of teen age boys and girls.

I. Changes in Time Over Time

A. Overall Change

From 1965-1981 there was a rise in free time for women as housework hours fell by more than market hours increased (Juster and Stafford, 1991, Table3) For men there was also an increase in free time as market hours declined by more than the modest increase in housework time. Here we show that as women age 30-55, especially married women, have increased their hours of labor market time, 1983 -2015⁶, there has been a decrease of routine housework time of a slightly larger magnitude, a modest continuation of the long term trend to less total work for women and one that is observed in more recent time (Aguiar and Hurst, 2007) but less change in total hours or the composition for men.

The share of women active in the labor market has risen, implying a continued compositional shift to market time from non-market worktime. Our interpretation rests on the growing access to a wide range of better occupational choices for women. The increase in market hours of work by women can be cast as being from an ‘encouraged worker’ effect of better occupational choices⁷. Based on hours measures for market work and daily housework from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the

⁵ Housework as measured in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics is defined as core housework – cooking, cleaning and other work around the house. Care of others such as children is not included but young children are known to increase core housework.

⁶ Much of the change occurred from 1983-2003.

⁷ Alternatively a positive labor force participation response to better wages.

changes, 1983-2015, can be seen in Table 1. The average hours of housework and market work of married and single men and women are presented, including those not active in the labor force⁸.

Total work time for married men age 30-55 shows a modest increase from 46.5 hours per week in 1983 to 50.1 hours per week in 2003 and then a modest decline to 48.2 hours per week in 2015. This increase, 1983-2003, for married men, is a departure from the long term trend to more free time for men. Does the 2003-2015 change represent a move back to more ‘free time’? What is more evident is the dramatic change in the composition of time for married women: as of 1983 market hours averaged 19.1 hours per week and by 2015 this was 28.2 hours – while routine housework fell from 26.9 to 15.4 hours, with most of the changes occurring 1983-2003. This represents a modest decline in overall work hours – the apparent continuation of the trend going back to 1965.⁹ There has been relative constancy of total work hour of women as there has been a compositional shift to more market work of higher value. This suggests that the economic growth achieved by women’s increased market work and away from routine housework has been accomplished without an overall increase in work time burden.

B. Time Squeeze?

Does more market activity of women and perhaps for some men imply a greater risk of a ‘time squeeze’? Time squeeze is primarily related to the distribution of the sum of market and non-market work hours. This has been most evident for some groups. In the 1970’s married women with preschool children took on most of the childcare and added routine housework. For career minded women, market work was also kept at high levels – giving up sleep and free time to balance the time budget (Hill and Stafford, 1985). Here we provide the percentile values for total work hours for

⁸ Measured as market hours from the prior calendar year > 0. Based on an extensive set of market hours measures in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

⁹ Of those women not in the labor market as of the 1983 survey routine housework averaged 35.5 hours per week of core housework.

married men and women conditional on positive market work activity. See Table 2. At the 75th and 90th percentiles there has been a modest decline in total work hours for women. Yet with the declining share of those out of the labor market, from 28.6 percent to 16.8 percent, it can be said that long total hours have become somewhat more prevalent. Is this better described as a growing time squeeze or an expected response to better wages and better occupational career choices for women – a qualitative better job ‘encouragement of labor supply effect’ leading to more market work or both? More market work at the extensive margin is attractive but routine housework is not scaled back by enough to increase free time across all married women.

For married men 1983-2003, there is a somewhat longer total hours at all percentile points. Can it be said that there is still a recent trend, 2003-2015, to more ‘free time’ given the substantial increase in the share with no market work? Here too we would say that this may be time purchased at the price of ‘discouragement’ arising from the less favorable occupational opportunities for some men. If so, as for women, there is again a nuanced reversal of the long term trend to a felicitous increase in ‘free time’.

II. Changing Work Roles of Younger Generations

A. Changes for Younger Marrieds

The move toward a range of higher value occupations by younger women can be interpreted in the context of three perspectives; unbalanced growth – with a rise in occupations favoring flexible reasoning (Black and Spitz-Oener, 2010), a companion skill-extensive technical change (Johnson and Stafford, 1998), and changing patterns of occupational exclusion (Bergmann, 1974). The role of these factors is reflected in the changing division of labor in terms of core housework.

Table 3 presents balanced panel data from three decades looking at changing housework of men and women in their 20’s, as they became married or remained

single by their 30's or upon marriage by their 30's. In a balanced panel, younger women had a near doubling of their housework time, 1983-1993 from 9.2 hours per week to 17.8 hours per week. In the 2003-2013 comparison, women's housework time also about doubles, but from 7.9 hours to 15.5 hours. And a notable change for 2003-2013 is that upon marriage men's housework time increases substantially, from 6.6 hours to 10.7 hours.

B. Housework Time of Teenagers, 2002-2014

To gain some insight into future time allocation and the long term trend to a more equal division of labor, we report on the housework of boys and girls age 13-18 as of 2002 and 2014. These data are from the Child Development Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. As of 2002 the diary-based average housework time of girls was 4.7 hours per week (40.5 minutes per day) and by 2014 this had fallen to 3.5 hours (30.0 minutes per day). For boys as of 2002 housework time averaged 2.5 hours (21.4 minutes per day). By 2014 it had risen to 3.1 hours per week (26.8 minutes per day), near equality with housework time of teen aged girls. These notable changes in the housework roles seem likely to persist into young adulthood and to continue the long term change to a more similar division of labor of men and women (Stafford, 1980).

Table 1 Changes in Housework and Market Work Hours of people aged 30-55 Per Week 1983,1993, 2003, 2013 and 2015

Year	1983			1993			2003			2013			2015		
	Housework	Market	Total	Housework	Market	Total	Housework	Market	Total	Housework	Market	Total	Housework	Market	Total
Men Married	6.4	40.1	46.5	7.5	40.9	48.4	7.7	42.4	50.1	8.4	40.1	48.5	7.8	40.4	48.2
Women Married	26.9	19.1	46.0	21.0	24.6	45.6	17.6	27.4	45.0	16.5	27.1	43.6	15.4	28.2	43.6
Men Single	7.2	37.2	44.4	7.9	33.9	41.8	7.9	37.3	45.2	8.3	32.9	41.2	8.3	34.3	42.6
Women Single	15.7	27.2	42.9	12.8	28.3	41.1	11.2	31.4	42.6	11.4	29.6	41.0	10.0	31.2	41.2

**Table 2 Time Squeeze for Total Work Hours per Week
of those Active in the Market and Percent not in the Market (Age 30-55)**

		Year	1983	1993	2003	2013	2015
		Percentile					
Women Married	25%	39.9	40.8	39.4	40.0	33.5	
	50%	49.8	49.0	48.7	48.3	45.5	
	75%	58.7	58.2	58.3	55.2	54.4	
	90%	69.0	67.4	68.0	65.0	63.5	
% of No Market-Work		28.57%	20.04%	17.30%	17.52%	16.77%	
Men Married	25%	40.3	41.9	43.5	43.0	41.6	
	50%	47.7	49.3	50.3	50.0	49.2	
	75%	55.2	57.9	58.7	58.1	57.9	
	90%	65.7	66.2	68.5	67.5	66.5	
% of No Market-Work		4.00%	3.27%	3.17%	6.34%	6.61%	

Table 3. Changes in Housework Time from 1983-2013 in three 10-year groups (weekly hours)								
	Male married from single		Female married from single		Male staying single		Female staying single	
	in 20-30s	in 30-40s	in 20-30s	in 30-40s	in 20-30s	in 30-40s	in 20-30s	in 30-40s
1983-1993	8.0	7.4	9.2	17.8	7.9	6.4	14.7	13.0
1993-2003	7.6	8.4	8.9	14.8	7.2	7.6	9.6	9.5
2003-2013	6.6	10.7	7.9	15.5	7.8	6.7	9.1	10.2

Table 4. Housework Time of Teenage Boys and Girls in 2002 and 2014 (Minutes/day)		
Year	2002	2014
Boys	21.4	26.8
Girls	40.5	30

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