

# Is Work-Family Policy Use Related to the Gendered Division of Housework?

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**Abstract** Researchers have proposed that work-family policy use may either reinforce or challenge the existing gendered division of labor within couples, but results from prior studies have been inconclusive. Using data from a regional survey of work and family life, we extend this research by focusing on how housework is divided within couples and by differentiating between traditionally *female-* and *male-* typed housework tasks. Results show that among dual-earning women, policy use is not related to share of female- or male-typed tasks. Among dual-earning men, policy use is positively related to share of female-typed tasks and negatively related to share of male-typed tasks. These findings suggest that work-family policy use does not reinforce the gendered division of housework.

**Keywords** Family · Gender · Housework · Work

## Introduction

The relationship between work-family policies and the gendered division of labor within the family has been hotly debated among scholars. This debate was especially rancorous regarding Felice Schwartz's (1989) mommy track proposal in the late 1980s. Schwartz maintained that employers have an economic interest in retaining good workers, regardless

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of their gender and family responsibility status; therefore, employers should offer women career-track options that allow them to maintain involvement with their careers *and* their families.

Some scholars were quick to point out the likely career consequence of the mommy track: stunted attainment relative to similarly qualified men (and women without children) and the reinforcement of the unequal gendered division of labor within families (Auerbach 1990; Bergman 1998; “Letters to the Editor” 1989). Other scholars pointed out the equalizing effect that family responsive arrangements could have on work and family responsibilities were they used by women *and* men (Auerbach 1990; Levine and Pittinsky 1997). That is, work-family –policies—including working at home, schedule flexibility, parental leave, and employer-provided childcare—could allow both mothers and fathers to be employed and to share housework responsibilities.

In this paper, we have tested whether work-family policy use is related to a more or less equal division of housework among dual-earner couples. We have extended past research in this area in a number of ways. First, we have related work-family policy use to the couple-level distribution of housework among dual-earning men and women. This housework share specification focuses on the percentage of housework contributed by each partner thereby allowing us to specifically examine whether policy use is related to the gendered division of household labor within couples. Second, we have disaggregated housework into different types: *female* tasks (such as cleaning, cooking meals, and laundry) are tasks that need to be performed frequently and are not flexible in their scheduling, and *male* tasks (such as auto repair and yard work) are tasks that need to be performed less frequently and offer more flexibility in scheduling. Finally, we have categorized workplace policies into two distinct types—work support and family support—to see if they are differentially related to housework shares. By examining the relationship between different types of work-family policy use and men and women’s share of female- and male-typed housework, this research helps us better understand the interface between work and family, while highlighting the implications such policies have for gender inequality.

## Background

In a recent review of domestic labor research, Coltrane (2000) enumerated emerging theoretical perspectives used to explain individuals’ domestic labor time. Studies that investigate how aspects of the work environment are related to housework—those that examine work-family policy use, for instance—are categorized within the *institutional* perspective. This perspective focuses on how the economy, state services, and other institutions impact domestic labor time (Coltrane 2000). Studies in this tradition are based on the premise that formal workplace structures and informal cultural norms facilitate and constrain employee actions, and thus may have implications for the division of housework within couples.

Work-family policies, like flexible scheduling, parental leave, employer provided childcare and the ability to work from home constitute an organizational recognition of the family responsibilities of employees. From the company viewpoint, work-family assistance prevents family problems from interfering with employees’ productivity (Glass and Estes 1997). Ideally, by offering these policies, the company would also reduce employee turnover and employee training costs (Drago et al. 2001; Schwartz 1989). From the family perspective, policies ease the work-family conflict faced by employed parents by enhancing (time and/or psychological) availability for housework (Glass and Estes 1997).

Yet, because family responsibilities have traditionally been women's domain, some scholars predict that policies designed to address the tension between work and family demands will simply reinforce the gendered division of housework (Bergmann 1998). Indeed, despite extensive changes in women's employment rates, housework has remained *women's work*. Married women's movement into paid employment has not been offset by a substantial increase in the amount of housework done by husbands (Bianchi et al. 2000; Ciscel et al. 2000; Sayer 2005), and thus responsibility for the *second shift* of housework has fallen primarily on working wives (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Policies designed to ease work-family conflict may be most appealing to women, who are more likely than men to use them to attend to traditionally female-typed tasks. Certainly research has shown that other alternative work arrangements, like self-employment, are put toward different ends by men and women, with women more likely than men to use self-employment to aid in work-family balance (Boden 1999), and with self-employed women spending less time than organizationally employed women in market work (Hundley 2001). This viewpoint, termed the *exploitation model* (Sullivan and Lewis 2001), assumes that women will use policies to better accomplish domestic work, and in this way, work-family policies will further cement the existing unequal division of housework within couples.

Others suggest that work-family policies offer men and women *new opportunities for flexibility* (Auerbach 1990; Levine and Pittinsky 1997; Sullivan and Lewis 2001). This model suggests that to the extent that work-family policies diminish the separation between home and work, policy use by men will lead to a decline in the gendered division of labor (Silver 1993). According to this perspective, if men use policies to take on more responsibility for housework, the gendered division of labor will be more equal. Some indirect empirical evidence supports this possibility. Studies show that men have become more involved in housework over time (Bianchi et al. 2000; Ciscel et al. 2000; Sayer 2005), and a growing percentage of men report that husbands and wives should share responsibility for providing income and performing housework (Ciabattari 2001). To date, findings from the small set of studies that explore the relationship between work-family policy use and men and women's housework have been mixed.

## Related Studies

Using an index measuring aspects of employer family responsiveness, including schedule flexibility, paid personal time, time off for childcare, and child day care, Silver and Goldscheider (1994) found that availability of work-family policies was positively related to the number of hours women spent in housework, but this finding held only for an older cohort of women. Another study showed few significant relationships between respondents' use of various work-family policies and housework time (Noonan et al. 2007). In this study, mothers who worked part-time spent more time in housework and their husbands spent less time in housework, but mothers with schedule flexibility spent *less* time in housework. For fathers, work-family policy use was not associated with time spent in housework. Bohlen and Viveros-Long (1981) found that flextime was associated with more time in family chores, but only among single mothers. Finally, Silver (1993) found that people who worked primarily from home did the same amount of housework as those who worked on-site (although results did show that working class homeworkers—most of whom were women—did significantly more housework than their on-site counterparts).

These findings are instructive since they suggest that work-family policies are not related to housework time in a uniform way. Beyond this, however, these studies give us little understanding of how policy use might be related to the gendered division of housework. There are a number of reasons that previous studies are not sufficient to address the question of how policies are related to the division of housework labor. To begin, some of these prior studies explored only one work-family policy (Bohen and Viveros-Long 1981; Silver 1993) or grouped all policies into one global measure (Silver and Goldscheider 1994). This is problematic since work-family policies are designed for different purposes, and therefore they are not likely to all have the same effect on housework responsibility. Additionally, these studies focused on the amount of time individuals spend in *all* housework tasks, an approach that ignores the differences in task-related time commitment, level of control over tasks, and gender-associated meanings attached to different kinds of housework tasks. Finally, none of the prior studies explicitly examined the relationship between policy use and the division of housework within couples. Instead, the outcome measure was the respondent's housework hours, and so no conclusions could be made concerning the division of labor within couples. We discuss each of these issues in more detail below.

### Family Support and Work Support Policies

The *time availability* perspective on housework is the theoretical foundation of prior research examining the relationship between work-family policy use and time spent in housework. This perspective holds that housework is performed according to the amount of time individuals have to perform it. Individuals who use work-family policies should have more time to devote to housework, resulting in a positive relationship between policy use and housework. Yet not all work-family policies are designed to reduce employee work time.

Work-family policies have been categorized into two general types: work support policies and family support policies (Drago and Hyatt 2003; Glass and Finley 2002; Voydanoff 2005). Work support policies (such as flextime, working at home, and dependent care benefits, like child care referral and on-site child care) recognize the caregiving needs of employed parents, but *do not* reduce the actual work hours of employees. Family support policies (such as sick leave and parental leave) *do* allow employees to reduce their work hours (either in the short-term or long-term) in response to family responsibilities. Given these important differences, we expected family support policies to have a greater positive impact than work support policies on the division of housework.

### Housework Types: *Female* and *Male* Tasks

Gender scholars have long pointed out that all housework is not equal (Blair and Lichter 1991; Coltrane 2000; Noonan 2001; Presser 1994; Sanchez and Kane 1996). Some housework tasks are *high control*; these include less frequent and more discretionary tasks such as yard work and car repair. Others are *low control* housework tasks, meaning they must be performed frequently and at set times. Such tasks include cooking, laundry, and cleaning. Research has consistently shown that men are more likely to do the first type of tasks while women are more likely to do the second type of tasks (see Coltrane 2000, for a list of studies documenting this finding). This has led to the convention of referring to low

control, inflexible, and frequent tasks (what Coltrane 2000, calls routine tasks) as *female*-typed tasks, and high control, flexible, and infrequent tasks as *male*-typed tasks.

A consideration of the kinds of tasks enhanced or discouraged by work–family policies is especially important in considerations of gender inequality, since it is female-typed housework that is most implicated in gender inequality (e.g., Noonan 2001, finds that female-typed tasks drive the negative association between housework and wages), and it is this kind of housework that scholars expect will be facilitated by work–family policy use (Bergmann 1998). Because female-typed tasks consist of chores that need to be performed on a daily basis, we expected these types of tasks to be more responsive to family support policies than male-typed tasks. Along these same lines, use of family support policies is contingent upon an acute family need (sickness or infant care), a situation resulting in an increased amount of female-typed housework to be done.

### Housework Share

The time availability perspective assumes that work–family policies allow women and men more time to spend in housework activities; most studies accordingly compare the housework time of policy users to the housework time of those who do not use policies. But if only respondent's housework time is used, inferences about the gendered division of labor within the home cannot be made. For example, policy users may spend more time in housework than non-policy users simply because they have larger homes or higher standards of cleanliness. If, for these reasons, the spouses of policy users also do more housework than the spouses of non-policy users, the relationship between policy use and the gendered division of labor within couples would be non-existent, even though an association between policy use and housework hours exists.

Moreover, the expectation that work–family policies will be related to the gendered division of labor does not necessarily require that policies encourage users to spend more *time* in housework compared to those who do not use policies. At its base, the expectation that policies will exacerbate or alleviate the gendered division of domestic labor simply suggests that policy use will affect the *couple-level distribution* of a set amount of household labor. In other words, this perspective asks the following: Does a policy user *do a greater percentage* of the total amount of housework within the home than a non-policy user?

In sum, housework share measures are better summary indicators of gender inequality than are absolute time measures, since they implicitly control for differences between couples in the absolute amount of time spent in housework due to unmeasured factors (e.g., size of home, propensity to do housework, cleanliness standards, efficiency in household labor, etc.) (Coltrane 2000). Even in households in which there is relatively little housework done by either member of the couple, share measures reflect whether this small amount of housework is shared more or less equally within the couple. Because our goal is to test whether policy use is associated with the division of household labor within couples, we need a measure reflecting this division, rather than a measure reflecting the time spent in housework.

### Research Questions

In this paper, we have expanded on past research by investigating female- and male-typed housework to see if different types of tasks are differentially related to the use of two types of work–family policies. Additionally, we have examined housework share, in contrast to

housework time, since a share measure better indicates gender in/equality in the division of housework labor within couples.

The time availability perspective on housework led us to expect that an individual who used family support policies—those policies that reduce work time for parents—would report a higher share of housework in comparison to those who did not use such policies. In particular, we expected that family support policy use would be associated with a higher share of female-typed tasks. Because male-typed tasks are done less frequently and less routinely, we did not expect family support policy use to be as strongly related to share of such tasks. Similarly, we did not expect work support policies—those that allow parents to change the timing or location of their work, but not their work hours—to be related to housework share of either type.

The expectation that family support policy use would be associated with a higher share of housework is gender-neutral, a position that takes into account the expectations of both the *exploitation* and *new opportunities for flexibility* models. Yet, the history of the gendered division of productive and reproductive labor suggests that policy use may not work in the same way for men and women. Even though work-family policies offer men and women the same opportunity to be more involved with domestic life, men's motivation behind using work-family policies may be different from women's. For example, men may be more likely to use policies to increase leisure time, perform more paid work, or simply to achieve an overall sense of control over daily life (Sullivan and Lewis 2001). Indeed, Bergmann (1998) contends that work-family policies “do little or nothing to counter the influence on male behavior that makes men withhold their labor from household tasks” (p. 11). Given this perspective, and the fact that the explanatory power of many housework predictors is dependent upon gender (e.g., see Bianchi et al. 2000), we have analyzed the relationship between work-family policy use and housework share separately for men and women, controlling for a number of factors known to affect the gendered division of domestic labor in general.

In particular, we have controlled for variables assessing three major theoretical explanations for the gendered division of household labor: time availability, relative resource, and gender perspectives (see Coltrane 2000, for a review of these perspectives). Simply put, the time availability argument posits housework will be divided according to the demand for such labor and the availability of household members to complete such labor. Family factors like marriage and number of children increase the amount of housework to be done, while labor market participation detracts from the amount of time available to commit to housework. The relative resource perspective suggests that the partner who contributes more income to the household will be able to *buy out* of housework on this basis (Blood and Wolfe 1960), or will do less housework due to efficiency maximization processes (Becker 1991). Finally, the gender perspective takes into account gender ideology/socialization, with the expectation that among those men and women with more egalitarian attitudes, domestic labor will be more equally shared. Taking these perspectives into account has allowed us to assess the nature of the relationship between work-family policy use and housework share net of these predictors of housework.

## Data and Methods

### Data

The data come from a 3-year (1998, 1999, and 2000) cross-sectional mail study of work and family life in a Midwestern state with an average response rate of 45%. The data were

aggregated across these 3 years, and the sample was restricted to men and women between the ages of 18 and 63 who were in dual-earning couples (either married or cohabiting). The total sample size for men is 345. The total for women is 295. We rely on this regional sample because of the unique combination of available information. To our knowledge, it is the only large-scale dataset that includes detailed policy use information and detailed housework information.<sup>1</sup>

## Variables

The main dependent variable, respondent's share of housework type, was constructed from self-reports of the respondents' estimated shares of a variety of household tasks. Respondents also indicated their spouses' shares and others' shares of household tasks. Respondents indicated approximately what percentage of each of 11 different household tasks was done by them, by their spouse/partner, and by other people (e.g., children, maid service, etc.). Responses range from 0 to 100%. We categorized these tasks into female-typed tasks (including housecleaning, cooking meals, cleaning up after meals, and laundry) and male-typed tasks (including yard work, home repair and auto repair). Because female-typed tasks consist of chores that need to be performed on a daily basis, we expect stronger relationships between such tasks, in comparison to more discretionary male tasks, and the predictor variables in our models. The remaining tasks—taking out the trash, handling finances, and shopping for groceries—have been previously identified as *gender-neutral* tasks (see, for instance Noonan 2001; and Coltrane 2000). These tasks were not included in our analysis.

We also constructed four additional dependent variables, including spouse and other share of female- and male-typed tasks. These measures are based on estimates provided by the respondent. When respondents' reports of own, spouse, and other housework share are summed, 85% of women's and 90% of men's estimates for male-typed tasks sum to 100. For female-typed tasks, 95% of women's and 89% of men's estimates of own, spouse, and others' contributions of such tasks sum to 100%. For both men and women, the majority of inaccurate estimates (i.e., total estimates that deviated from 100%) were in the range of 75–10%. This type of measurement error is common in studies of housework (Coltrane 2000; Marini and Shelton 1993). Because this error reflects both over- and under-estimation of the various contributions to male- and female-typed tasks, the effect of such error on the results is likely to be minimal.

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<sup>1</sup> To assess data representativeness, we compared our sample statistics for dual-earning men and women to nationally representative data on dual-earning men and women from the 1997 *National Survey of the Changing Workforce* (NSCW). Although the NSCW is a sample of *workers*, while ours is a sample of *families with dependent children*, the surveys are alike on a number of demographic and economic indicators. In fact, on most important work and family-related indicators, the samples are virtually identical. For instance, women in our sample are only slightly better educated than those in the NSCW, and there is no education difference among men. A little more than one-third of men and women in both samples worked in professional and managerial jobs. Of four work-family policies that were comparably measured across the samples (i.e., flexible scheduling, parental leave, sick leave, and child care availability), the average number of available policies was approximately two for both samples. The average workweek of men was 47 h in our sample and 48 h in the NSCW, although the difference for women was a little larger at 35 in our sample compared to 41 in the NSCW. Finally, the mean incomes of men and women is similar in both samples, with men in our sample earning an average of approximately \$46,000 compared to \$48,000 in the NSCW; women in our sample earned approximately \$29,000, compared to \$25,000 in the NSCW.



Our main independent variables are work-family policy use. Family support policy use is assessed by a count of recent use (i.e., within the year preceding the interview) of family leave and sick leave and ranges from 0 to 2. Work support policy use counts the use of flexible scheduling, on-site childcare and working at home, and ranges from 0 to 3.

Time availability variables include the couple's work shifts, respondent's and spouse's total work hours, respondent's work schedule, and the ages and number of children in the household. Following Presser (1994), couple split-shifts is a dummy variable with 1 indicating that wives worked during the day and husbands worked evenings or at night and 0 otherwise. We expected that when men are available during day-time hours and their wives are not, women in such couples will do less housework and men will do more. Respondent's total work hours and spouse's total work hours are continuous measures of weekly work hours. Respondent's regular work scheduling is a dummy variable with a 1 indicating that the respondent worked daytime hours. We expected that a respondent's work hours and normative work schedule (e.g., daytime, non-shift work) would be negatively associated with a respondent's share of housework, but that spouse's work hours would be positively associated with a respondent's housework share.

Because children have been shown to exercise a gender traditionalizing effect on the division of housework within couples (LaRossa and LaRossa 1981; Walzer 1998), we expected that greater numbers of children and the presence of preschool children will be associated with a higher share of housework performed by women. Presence of child under six is a dummy variable coded 1 if there was a preschool child in the home and 0, otherwise. Number of children is a count of all children under 18 who lived in the home.

To take into account the resources perspective on the division of housework labor, we have included a measure assessing the percentage of total family income earned by the respondent. This variable allowed us to control for the notion that spouses with greater comparative resources buy out of household labor (Blood and Wolfe 1960) or specialize in employment-related activities (Becker 1991). For both men and women, percentage of total family income earned by the respondent should be negatively related to share of household labor. We have also included an ordinal measure of education for both respondents and spouses. These variables were coded so that high scores indicate higher education levels (0 = less than high school degree; 1 = high school degree; 2 = associates degree or vocational training; 3 = bachelor degree; 4 = graduate and/or professional school attendance or completion). We expected both of these measures to be negatively related to housework share.

The gender perspective is taken into account with two gender egalitarianism measures. One is an index of gender attitudes regarding workplace opportunities/attainment and reflects respondents level of agreement (on a four-point scale) with two statements: (a) "On the job, men should be willing to work under women" and (b) "A woman should have exactly the same job opportunities as a man." A second measure assesses attitudes regarding gender egalitarianism within the home. This four-point item indicates a respondent's level of agreement with the statement: "Men should share the work around the house with women (such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth)." Both measures were expected to be associated with a higher share of housework for men and a lower share of such housework for women.

Finally, we have included three control variables that may impact the relationship between work-family policy use and housework responsibility. Total family income is included because it may be related to the outsourcing of housework tasks to others (i.e., maid service, etc.). We controlled for the respondent's occupational status with a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent's occupation was managerial/professional, and coded 0,



otherwise. We included this variable because managerial/professional occupations offer employees more autonomy, which may affect how policies are related to housework. A race variable, coded 1 for non-Hispanic whites and 0 for all others, is also included in our models since race has been shown to be related to the division of labor in the home (Coltrane 2000).

## Methods

We estimated nested models using OLS regression. First, we predicted the respondent's share of housework including only work-family policy use and the control variables in the model. We then added successive blocks of variables, including those that tap time availability, relative resources and gender egalitarianism, to see if these variables mediate the relationship between work-family policy use and housework share.

We estimated models separately for men and women since the effect of many housework predictors have been shown to be moderated by gender. For both, we have related family support and work support policies to own, spouse's, and other's share of female-typed tasks and to male-typed tasks. To test whether these implicit gender interactions are significant, we performed z-tests for the differences in the effects of work-family policy use on housework for men and women (Cohen and Cohen 1983).<sup>2</sup> In each case in which work-family policy use is significantly related to housework share among men or women, z-tests show that these gender interactions are statistically significant (results available by request). This means that the relationships between work-family policy use and housework share is different for men and women.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for variables used in the analyses are presented in Table 1. We show statistics for men and women separately, and indicate whether gender differences are statistically significant.

To begin, work-family policy use was greater among women than among men. Results in the first two rows of Table 1 show that women were significantly more likely than men to use both family support and work support policies.

The next three panels show the means and standard deviations for own, spouse's, and other's share of female- and male-typed tasks. Not surprisingly, women reported a much greater responsibility for female-typed tasks than did men (72% vs. 30%), while men reported greater responsibility for male-typed tasks than women (76% vs. 19%). Respondents' estimates of spouses' shares of different types of household tasks showed the same gendered pattern. There were also gender differences in the share of tasks performed by others; compared to men, women reported that others spend a higher percentage of time on male-typed tasks (14% vs. 10%). There were no gender differences in reports of female-typed tasks performed by others.

Compared to women, men worked longer hours, but were less likely to work a standard day schedule. Women's spouses worked longer hours than did men's spouses. There were

<sup>2</sup> The z-test uses the following formula:  $z = b_M - b_W / \sqrt{SE_{bm}^2 + SE_{bw}^2}$

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for variables in the analysis

Variable	Men ( <i>N</i> = 345)		Women ( <i>N</i> = 295)	
	Mean (or %)	S.D.	Mean (or %)	S.D.
Family support policy use***	0.35	0.52	0.48	0.59
Work support policy use***	0.48	0.72	0.64	0.82
Own housework share				
Female-typed tasks***	29.68	18.03	72.47	18.01
Male-typed tasks***	76.25	20.72	18.93	14.51
Spouse housework share				
Female-typed tasks***	64.83	18.64	21.19	16.30
Male-typed tasks ***	12.15	13.30	64.44	22.04
Other housework share				
Female-typed tasks	5.33	10.10	6.08	10.61
Male-typed tasks***	9.93	17.22	13.70	18.96
Time availability variables				
Respondent work hours***	47.29	10.58	34.45	12.64
Spouse work hours***	34.85	13.75	45.72	11.70
Couple split shifts	0.05	0.23	0.06	0.25
Day hours*	0.79		0.85	
Number of children under 18	2.07	0.83	2.03	0.92
Presence of preschool child***	0.34		0.46	
Relative resource variables				
Percent of total family income earned by respondent***	64	15.6	40	15.76
Respondent education	2.03	1.19	2.10	1.21
Spouse education	1.96	1.17	1.87	1.17
Gender perspective				
Gender egalitarianism-home***	3.46	0.52	3.72	0.49
Gender egalitarianism-work***	3.37	0.49	3.58	0.51
Background variables				
Total family income	73,893	37,982	72,182	39,811
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	0.95		0.96	
Mang./prof. occupation	0.37		0.40	

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$  (for *t*-test of differences between men and women)

no gender differences in the number of children in the home, but women were more likely to have a preschool child than were men.

Men and women had similar family incomes, but men's income accounted for more of total family income than women's income. Men and women did not differ in their education levels. Women were more likely to have gender egalitarian attitudes about both work and home realms than were men. Similar proportions of men and women were non-Hispanic whites and worked in managerial and professional occupations. These findings all comport with contemporary patterns regarding gender, employment and housework, and offer further evidence that the data used here is similar to nationally representative data sets.

**Table 2** OLS determinants of own share of female-typed housework tasks,  $N = 295$  women

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Family support policy use	-4.21**	1.79	-2.48	-2.48	-1.92	1.81	-1.88	1.80
Work support policy use	1.11	1.29	0.51	1.29	0.52	1.26	0.21	1.25
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	12.52**	5.09	-0.97**	5.01	11.16**	4.90	9.89**	4.89
Mang./prof. occupation	-1.33	2.22	0.17	2.21	2.11	2.33	1.78	2.32
Total family income (in thousands)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Couple split shifts			3.02	0.00	3.30	5.22	2.56	5.18
Respondent work hours			-0.36***	0.00	-0.31***	0.09	-0.29***	0.09
Day hours			4.17	0.00	5.26	3.62	5.07	3.60
Spouse work hours			0.18**	0.00	0.14	0.09	0.16*	0.09
Presence of preschool children			-2.50	0.00	-1.63	2.06	-1.25	2.05
Number of children under 18			-0.33	0.00	-0.60	1.10	-0.65	1.09
Respondent percentage of total family income					-0.20***	0.07	-0.19***	0.07
Respondent education					0.00	1.10	0.40	1.10
Spouse education					-3.02***	1.04	-2.84***	1.04
Gender egalitarianism-home							-4.57*	2.54
Gender egalitarianism-work							-1.21	2.58
$R^2$	0.03		0.08		0.13		0.14	

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$

## Regression Results

We first present the regression results for women; Table 2 shows the results for share of female tasks and Table 3 shows the results for share of male tasks. In contrast to our expectation, a woman's use of family support policies was negatively associated with her share of female-typed housework tasks (see Model 1 in Table 2). With each additional family support policy used, a woman's responsibility for female-typed tasks declined by approximately 4% points. This relationship is attenuated in Model 2, with the addition of time availability variables. In particular, work hours mediated the negative relationship between family support policy use and female-typed housework, suggesting that women who worked longer hours were more likely to use family support policies and to perform a lower share of female-typed housework.

Control variables operated mostly as expected. Consistent with the time availability perspective, women with longer work hours performed a lower share of female-typed housework, while those whose spouses worked longer hours performed a higher share. Consistent with the relative resource and gender perspectives, women who earned a higher proportion of total family income and who had more gender egalitarian attitudes regarding home roles also had a lower housework share. The null relationship between women's education and female-typed housework was unexpected from a relative resource perspective, but the negative relationship between spouse's education and women's housework share was consistent with some prior research (Coltrane 2000).

**Table 3** OLS determinants of own share of male-typed housework tasks,  $N = 295$  women

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>
Family support policy use	-1.85	1.47	-1.62	1.54	-1.48	1.56	-1.47	1.56
Work support policy use	0.44	1.05	0.55	1.09	0.54	1.09	0.41	1.09
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	6.53	4.34	6.65	4.34	6.48	4.38	6.04	4.40
Mang./prof. occupation	2.45	1.84	2.84	1.87	2.25	2.03	2.10	2.04
Total family income (in thousands)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Couple split shifts			4.07	4.56	4.44	4.54	4.13	4.56
Respondent work hours			0.01	0.07	0.04	0.08	0.05	0.08
Day hours			-0.45	3.12	-0.49	3.12	-0.62	3.12
Spouse work hours			0.05	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.08
Presence of preschool children			-2.52	1.76	-2.48	1.79	-2.35	1.80
Number of children under 18			0.67	0.94	0.56	0.94	0.56	0.95
Respondent percentage of total family income					-0.07	0.06	-0.07	0.06
Respondent education					0.84	0.96	1.00	0.97
Spouse education					1.09	0.90	1.16	0.90
Gender egalitarianism-home							-2.48	2.21
Gender egalitarianism-work							0.13	2.24
$R^2$	0.02		0.03		0.05		0.06	

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$

The null finding for the relationship between a woman's work-family policy use and her share of female-typed tasks did not support our expectation that policy use would be associated with greater shares of housework. This finding suggests that women's use of policies did not contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles in the home.

Results in Table 3 show that neither family support policy use nor work support policy use was associated with a woman's share of male-typed tasks. This is consistent with our expectations, but the lack of an association between policy use and share of female-typed tasks is counter to our expectation that policy use should be more strongly associated with female- than male-typed tasks.

In contrast to the findings for women, the results for men show that work-family policy use was related to a man's share of female-typed housework. Consistent with expectations, use of family support policies was associated with a higher share of female-typed tasks among men (see Model 1 in Table 4). For each additional family support policy used, a man's share of female-typed housework increased by 4 percentage points. Also consistent with expectations, work support policy use was not associated with share of female-typed tasks among men. Results in Model 2 of Table 4 show that although many time availability factors were significantly associated with a man's share of female-typed tasks, none mediated the relationship between family support policy use and share of female-typed tasks. The findings that day shift hours and work hours were both negatively associated with a man's share of female-typed tasks, and that spouse work hours were positively associated with a man's female-typed housework share are consistent with our time availability expectations. The large positive relationship between presence of preschool child and a man's share of female-typed housework is contrary to our expectations that

**Table 4** OLS determinants of own share of female-typed housework tasks,  $N = 345$  Men

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>
Family support policy use	4.06**	1.88	4.61***	1.72	3.87**	1.73	2.75*	1.66
Work support policy use	-0.30	1.40	0.31	1.29	0.47	1.27	0.92	1.21
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	-3.00	4.39	-4.73	4.02	-5.09	3.98	-5.07	3.79
Mang./prof. occupation	-4.61**	2.18	-1.85	2.02	-1.56	2.16	-1.29	2.06
Total family income (in thousands)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Couple split shifts			-2.57	4.36	-2.98	4.30	-2.54	4.10
Respondent work hours			-0.36***	0.09	-0.32***	0.09	-0.31***	0.08
Day hours			-6.14**	2.55	-6.55**	2.53	-5.23**	2.42
Spouse work hours			0.44***	0.07	0.34***	0.07	0.29***	0.07
Presence of preschool children			6.26***	1.90	5.19***	1.89	4.43**	1.82
Number of children under 18			-0.33	1.10	-0.09	1.09	-0.05	1.03
Respondent percentage of total family income					-0.22***	0.07	-0.20***	0.06
Respondent education					0.90	0.93	0.43	0.89
Spouse education					-0.45	0.88	-0.73	0.84
Gender egalitarianism-home							10.62***	1.92
Gender egalitarianism-work							-1.40	2.02
$R^2$	0.03		0.22		0.25		0.32	

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$

preschool children would result in a greater share of such housework for women but not men.

The addition of resource variables (see Model 3 in Table 4) attenuated the relationship between men’s family support policy use and share of female-typed tasks, but these variables did not fully mediate this relationship. As expected, the ratio of men’s earnings to total family income was negatively related to share of female-typed tasks, a finding consistent with the notion that relative financial resources are transformed into power in housework negotiations (Ross 1987). Finally, gender egalitarianism variables were added in Model 4. Men with more gender egalitarian attitudes about the family realm reported greater responsibility for female-typed tasks. Each additional one point increase on the gender egalitarian-home index was associated with a 10% point increase in a man’s share of female-typed housework tasks. The inclusion of the gender attitude variables attenuated the relationship between family support policy use and men’s share of female-typed tasks, but this relationship is still marginally statistically significant ( $p < 0.10$ ).

Next, we explored whether men’s policy use was associated with their wives’ shares of female-typed housework. Results in Table 5 show that men’s use of family support policies was associated with a lower share of female-typed housework among their wives. This relationship persists with the addition of time availability, relative resource, and gender egalitarianism variables. In sum, a man who used family support policies did a larger share of female-typed housework than his non-policy using counterpart, and his wife did a lower share of female-typed tasks than the wives of men who did not use family support policies.

**Table 5** OLS determinants of wives' share of female-typed housework tasks,  $N = 345$  men

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>
Family support policy use	-3.40**	1.94	-4.41**	1.82	-3.84**	1.83	-2.55*	1.51
Work support policy use	-0.12	1.44	-0.24	1.34	-0.38	1.35	-0.88	1.28
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	-0.54	4.52	2.42	4.23	2.86	4.22	2.67	4.02
Mang./prof. occupation	4.71**	2.24	2.21	2.13	2.10	2.29	1.87	2.19
Total family income (in thousands)	-0.01**	-0.00	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01*	0.00
Couple split shifts			3.87	4.59	3.62	4.57	3.11	4.34
Respondent work hours			0.36***	0.09	0.33***	0.09	3.21***	0.09
Day hours			6.07**	2.68	6.34**	2.68	5.01	2.57
Spouse work hours			-0.46***	0.07	-0.39***	0.08	-0.34***	0.08
Presence of preschool children			-2.26	2.00	-2.09	2.00	-0.81	1.92
Number of children under 18			-1.91	1.16	-2.15*	1.16	-2.24**	1.10
Respondent percentage of total family income					0.17**	0.06	0.15**	0.07
Respondent education					-1.19	0.98	-0.65	0.94
Spouse education					1.22	0.94	1.52*	0.89
Gender egalitarianism-home							-10.68***	2.04
Gender egalitarianism-work							0.04	2.13
$R^2$	0.04		0.19		0.21		0.29	

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$

Taken together, these findings fit with the *new opportunities for flexibility* perspective on how work-family policy use might be related to the division of domestic labor.

Finally, in Table 6 we have shown results for the regression models predicting men's share of male-typed tasks. Contrary to our expectations, results in Model 1 show that work support policy use was negatively associated with a man's share of male-typed tasks. This relationship remained with the addition of the time availability variables, resource variables, and gender egalitarianism variables. Total family income was the only variable, in addition to work support policy use, that was associated with a man's share of male-typed housework; for every \$10,000 increase in total family income, a man's share of male-typed housework decreased by 1% point.

Who was taking on more of the responsibility for male-typed housework when men used work support policies? Regression results showed no association between a man's policy use and his wife's share of male-typed tasks (results not shown; available upon request). However, as shown in Table 7, we found that men who used work support policies reported that *others* perform a larger share of male-typed tasks. For every additional work support policy used by a man, others' share of male-typed tasks increased by 3.6% points. This association remained significant with the inclusion of all the predictor variables. One explanation for this relationship could be that men who use work support policies had higher incomes, and thus could afford to shift some of the traditionally male-typed tasks to others outside the home. But total family income was included as a control variable, so this explanation does not seem to completely account for the relationship

**Table 6** OLS determinants of own share of male-typed housework tasks, N = 345 men

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>
Family support policy use	0.78	2.15	0.15	2.18	0.01	2.22	0.68	2.23
Work support policy use	-4.35***	1.59	-4.45***	1.62	-4.47***	1.63	-4.70***	1.62
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	5.74	5.00	6.80	5.06	6.96	5.10	6.61	5.08
Mang./prof. occupation	0.80	2.48	1.25	2.55	0.79	2.78	0.84	2.77
Total family income (in thousands)	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01**	0.00
Couple split shifts			2.30	5.50	2.23	5.53	1.96	5.51
Respondent work hours			0.06	0.11	0.07	0.11	0.06	0.11
Day hours			-1.96	3.23	-2.15	3.27	-2.53	3.27
Spouse work hours			-0.14*	0.08	-0.14	0.09	-0.12	0.09
Presence of preschool children			3.12	2.39	3.06	2.43	3.41	2.44
Number of children under 18			-0.27	1.39	-0.27	1.40	-0.37	1.39
Respondent percentage of total family income					0.00	0.08	0.00	0.08
Respondent education					0.42	1.19	0.71	1.19
Spouse education					0.21	1.13	0.36	1.13
Gender egalitarianism-home							-3.31	2.59
Gender egalitarianism-work							-2.27	2.59
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05		0.07		0.07		0.08	

\**p* < .10; \*\**p* < .05; \*\*\**p* < .01

between work support policy use and share of male-typed tasks. The fact that the relationships between men’s work support policy use and their own and others’ share of male-typed tasks remained significant net of family income suggests that these findings are not simply due to the fact that men with higher incomes were more likely to outsource male-typed housework responsibilities.

The data do not allow for identification of *who* the *others* are, and so we were not able to tell if men were actually outsourcing their responsibilities, or if they were somehow downloading their responsibilities, perhaps to their children. It may be that men who used work support policies had more time to mentor their children in male-typed tasks, such as lawn work and car repair, and then their children are performing this work. The results do tell us, however, that a man’s use of work support policies was not associated with a greater share of male-typed housework performed by his wife.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

In this paper, we evaluate arguments concerning whether work-family policy use reinforces or challenges the gendered division of household labor within couples. To do so, we examined how work support and family support policies were related to dual-earning men’s and women’s responsibility for different kinds of housework. We expected that family support polices would be more strongly related to housework share than work



**Table 7** OLS determinants of others' share of male-typed housework tasks,  $N = 345$  men

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
Family support policy use	-0.97	1.77	-0.35	1.78	-0.43	1.81	-0.92	1.83
Work support policy use	3.69 ***	1.30	3.52***	1.32	3.57***	1.33	3.72***	1.33
Race (1 = non-Hispanic white)	-2.76	4.12	-4.06	4.14	-4.19	4.18	-3.79	4.17
Mang./prof. occupation	-2.89	2.04	-3.52*	2.09	-3.58	2.27	-3.79*	2.27
Total family income (in thousands)	0.01***	0.00	0.01***	0.00	0.01***	0.00	0.01***	0.00
Couple split shifts			1.71	4.50	1.72	4.52	1.92	4.50
Respondent work hours			0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09
Day hours			0.61	2.63	0.58	2.66	0.69	2.67
Spouse work hours			0.06	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.08
Presence of preschool children			-4.76*	1.95	-4.69**	1.99	-4.75**	2.00
Number of children under 18			1.58	1.14	1.62	1.14	1.73	1.14
Respondent percentage of total family income					-0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.07
Respondent education					0.38	0.94	0.16	0.98
Spouse education					-0.54	0.92	-0.64	0.92
Gender egalitarianism-home							1.09	2.11
Gender egalitarianism-work							3.16	2.22
$R^2$	0.06		0.09		0.09		0.10	

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$

support policies, and we expected that share of female-typed housework would be more responsive to policy use than that of male-typed housework.

Consistent with expectations, we found that men who use family support policies perform a higher share of female-typed housework, and their wives perform a lower share of female-typed housework. Other results were contrary to predictions. Men who use work support policies report a *lower* share of male-typed housework than men who do not use work support policies. And, for women, we found no significant relationship between either type of policy use and housework share. Women's use of family support policies was negatively associated with their share of female-typed tasks, but this association was mediated by women's work hours.

None of these findings support the hypothesis that work-family policy use strengthens the division of domestic labor along gender lines (i.e., exploitation model). Our findings, instead, lend credence to the *new opportunities for flexibility* perspective. The positive relationship between men's use of family support policies and their share of female-typed tasks persists even after controlling for time availability, relative resource, and gender egalitarianism variables, suggesting that this association is not attributable to factors that might predict both housework share and family policy use among men. This contradicts Bergmann's (1998) contention that work-family policy use will not, on its own, encourage men to do more housework.

It is important to note that because these data are cross-sectional, we cannot infer causality from our results. Our argument has been based on the notion that individuals'

family support policy use would affect their contribution to housework. However, it is also possible that individuals who have substantial housework responsibility are more apt to use family supportive policies, or even to take jobs offering work-family policies. Questions about individuals' motivations behind policy use were not asked in this survey, and so we cannot clarify the timing of events in our analysis. Yet even if individuals were assuming a greater share of housework due to the birth of a child (or other family need) and using family support policies to facilitate the performance of female-typed tasks, the fact that we do not observe a relationship between family support policies and women's housework shares still suggests that the *exploitation model* is not operating; the observed relationship between these policies and men's housework also suggests that such policies offer families new *opportunities for flexibility* in the assignment of housework.

But the *new opportunities for flexibility* model cannot explain the fact that men who use work support policies are liberated from traditionally male-typed housework. This relationship merits attention in future research. Importantly, wives do not seem to be making up for husbands' decreased responsibility for these tasks. Instead, men who use work support policies are more likely to report that *others* bear a larger responsibility for male-typed housework tasks.

The lack of a relationship between family support policies and women's share of female-typed tasks might be due to the fact that women bear the lion's share of responsibility for these tasks even in the absence of such policies (Sayer 2005). Women who use family leave, for instance, may not increase their responsibility level compared to non-policy users because most women *already* do a large share of female-typed housework. Because men typically do less housework than women, they have room to expand their share of household labor.

It is important to keep in mind that housework does not comprise all of domestic labor; childcare and emotional labor are also important aspects of domestic labor, and each holds the potential for women's exploitation, as both childcare and emotional labor are more likely to be done by women than men. It may also be that women are more likely to use policies to perform childcare than to perform housework. In fact, Noonan et al. (2007) found that policy use by mothers was positively related to the time mothers and fathers spent in childcare. Policy use may also be related to emotional labor; perhaps employees who are able to loosen work strictures are more able to engage in the invisible caring work implicit in family life. Of course, employees may be doing something altogether different with the freedom they gain from using work-family policies, like taking care of their own health needs or running personal errands. Although research has shown that employees who use policies experience less work-family conflict than those who do not (Glass and Estes 1997), we still do not have a good idea about the specific ends to which working parents apply work-family policies (Estes 2005). We encourage researchers to attend to these issues in future research.

Our study reaffirms past findings that show few relationships between policy use and housework among women, and it offers new insight into how work-family policy use is related to housework among men. With a specific focus on how policies may be related to the gendered character of housework, we have shown that the division of housework within couples is unrelated to wives' policy use but is affected by husbands' policy use. As such, this research contributes to the literature suggesting that work-family policy use does not result in women's exploitation in the home, and may, in fact, encourage men's involvement in housework.

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