

Does gender equality in unpaid work increase couples' childbearing?

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A preliminary paper – please do not quote!

ABSTRACT

While women's stronger position in the labour market and education tends to diminish fertility, gender egalitarian relationships within the family are expected to have the opposite effect. Previous research on gender equality and fertility is, however, inconclusive as both egalitarian and traditional families are found to have higher intended and realized fertility. Evidence from the Nordic countries suggests that when men are more willing to provide child care, couples are more likely to have a next child. It is unclear whether this is due to more egalitarian relationships within the family, sharing of certain tasks, or to selection processes.

The Time Use Study 1998-1999 in Finland provides a unique opportunity to examine how various aspects of gender equality within families predicts subsequent childbearing. We combine TUS1999 data with data on births until 2010 and use logistic regression models to examine how the amount of unpaid domestic work and its division between partners is related to couples' childbearing. Results show that an increase in woman's housework time significantly reduces the likelihood of continued childbearing. When gender equality in the family is measured as a man's share of housework no marked association between the division of housework and subsequent childbearing appears. On the other hand, men's relative child-care time has a weak inverse U-shaped effect on couple's childbearing. Findings are markedly robust to the inclusion of other socio-economic or demographic variables.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between gender equality and childbearing in low fertility countries has been the focus of considerable interest among social scientists. In today's Europe traditional attitudes and behaviour are often associated with earlier and higher fertility (eg Westoff and Higgins 2009; Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006). However, gender equality also appears to boost fertility at least in some countries and situations (eg Duvander & Andersson 2006; Puur et al. 2008). Thus a clear division of tasks and expectations between spouses may facilitate everyday life, while so-called transitional or intermediate couples struggle most with combining family and work (Torr and Short 2004:123; Miettinen, Basten & Rotkirch 2011).

Shared parenting and men's participation in domestic work is often predicted to alleviate women's double burden and facilitate the couple's decision to have a(nother) child. In societies, in which the 'gender revolution' in the public sphere has its counterpart in families, eg. when men are willing to

share domestic responsibilities, fertility should thus rise (McDonald 2000a and 2000b). However, so far the existing research has provided conflicting evidence of the relationship between gender equality and fertility.

Paternal involvement in child care signals a commitment to both fatherhood and the current couple relationship and has repeatedly been found to have some, if typically quite small, effect on fertility, especially regarding the second child (Cooke 2004 and 2008). Thus in Spain and Italy, fathers who play a substantial role in care activities with the first-born have a second child sooner (Cooke 2008). Longer than average parental leaves were also, up to a certain point, associated with higher risk of having subsequent children in Sweden (Duvander and Andersson 2006). Similarly, Italian fathers' participation in domestic labour and childcare significantly increased the intention to have a second child among working women (Pinnelli and Fiori 2008).

When we study the effect of male involvement in domestic work as separate from direct child care the results are even more contradictory. Tazi-Preve et al. (2004) found that a traditional division of household labour in Austria clearly diminished people's wish to have a(nother) baby, with the inverse being the case in more egalitarian partnerships. In Norway, a higher mean share of home production by men was found to relate to a fertility increase of as much as 0.27 (Laat and Sanz 2007). In Sweden, the impact of egalitarian division of housework was modified by expectations: it was the inconsistency between ideals and reality which delayed childbearing (Goldscheider & Bernhardt 2011). However, Cooke (2004), and Nilsson (2010) found no effect of the man's share of domestic work on fertility. Neither did Schober (2012) find any clear effect of British men's domestic work and fertility, although less participating men had higher risk of divorce. Torr and Short (2004) reported a U-shaped relationship between fertility and gender equity, as indicated by the division of domestic tasks: both traditional couples and couples who shared housework more evenly were more likely to have a second child.

Finland is a country with a relatively high level of gender equity in both public and private life and thus well into the second phase of the gender revolution. In a previous study we found a slight U-shaped effect of gender attitudes on the fertility intentions of Finns, the impact being more pronounced among men and regarding family size ideals. Gender attitudes had no significant impact on more proximate fertility intentions. Family orientation was more strongly related to fertility intentions and ideals than was gender equality *per se*. (Miettinen et al. 2011.). Here, we will explore how men's actual contribution in child care and housework and a more egalitarian division of labour between partners affect couple's childbearing.

Measuring equality in household work is difficult given the various and overlapping nature of the different tasks. Subjective accounts of the partners' relative contributions to unpaid work may be affected by gender role attitudes and satisfaction towards current division of tasks. Spouses also tend to overestimate their own contribution while the estimations of their partners' share have been found to be more accurate (Layte 1999; Lee & Waite 2005). Time use data provide one relatively reliable way of assessing men's and women's contributions to household work, and systemized data collection methods have provided a unique tool for researchers to examine trends and patterns of time use across different countries and over time. To our knowledge, time use surveys have not been used to investigate the impact of domestic division of tasks on couple's childbearing

previously. In this paper, we use time use data (Finnish TUS1999) to study whether more egalitarian sharing of domestic work and child care promotes fertility among Finnish couples.

We hypothesize that increased gender equality in child care and domestic work will elevate the likelihood of the couple to have a(nother) child over next five years, controlling for age and other demographic and socioeconomic variables.

DATA AND METHODS

We use Finnish Time Use Study 1998-1999 (TUS1999, conducted by Statistics Finland) to examine the relationship between the division of household tasks and childbearing among Finnish couples with 0-2 children. TUS1999 collected data on time use from all members (over 10 years of age) of the sampled households. Our analyses use time use data from actual partners (married or cohabiting couples). Survey data was combined with register data on births (until 2010) by Statistics Finland, allowing us to explore how the division of domestic work as well as other individual and couple-level characteristics as measured in 1999 affect fertility over subsequent years.

Our main explanatory variable is the division of household labour between partners. Time use studies use the diary method to collect data on individual's time use. Participants are asked to report their daily activities during two days. For this study, we defined household tasks to include meal preparation, dish washing, cleaning house, washing and ironing, shopping, car maintenance and repairing of other household equipment, outdoor tasks, etc. We further classified some of these activities as 'everyday tasks': these included preparation of meals, dish washing, doing the laundry and ironing, cleaning house, and shopping – tasks which are traditionally defined as feminine household tasks. We also distinguished child-care time from other domestic work. Child care included activities such as helping children with their meals, physical care of children, helping with their homework, playing and reading with children, going out with children or accompanying them, and transporting children to school, day care, or hobbies. The division of housework is operationalized as a man's share of housework, measured as the percentage of time men spend in housework (total, or in everyday tasks) or in child-care tasks relative to the total daily housework or child-care time of both partners.

Our analyses are restricted to women and men who were either married or living in a consensual union in 1999, and who had 0, 1, or 2 children at the time of TUS1999 (and the age of the youngest child was not above 15 years). In addition, we only included couples where the woman was between 18 and 44 years old (in 1999). Due to these restrictions, TUS1999 data diminished considerably, leaving us with a little over 1000 diary days (appr. 500 couples).

We apply logistic regression models to analyse the impact of the division of domestic work on the birth of a child over subsequent five years following TUS1999 survey. We control for the age of the female respondent, number of children and the age of the youngest child, both partners' educational attainment, woman's economic activity (employed, not employed, studying), and her relative income (woman's income as a percentage of the total household income) (see Appendix Table 1 for the distribution of the socioeconomic variables). All control variables are measured at the time of

TUS1999 survey (e.g. they are time-invariant). In addition, due to the way time use data is collected (all participants keep diary during one week day, and during one day of the weekend) we controlled for the type of the diary day, applying weights when presenting descriptive results of the data. In the multivariate analyses, we used SPSS Complex Samples logistic regression.

Our analytical strategy was the following. We first explored the impact of housework and child care on continued childbearing by considering various measures of housework: each partner's housework time in all household chores, in everyday tasks, and in child care (in absolute hours). Next, we examined the impact of the man's relative time use in these activities on the couple's childbearing. In the final analysis (tables presented) we used a woman's housework time, her partner's share of the household work, and his share squared to capture potential non-linearity of the effect. We present models for pooled parities as well as the transitions to first, second and third births separately to see whether the association between the division of housework and childbearing varied by parity. In the following, we focus on the impact of housework variables, leaving the impact of socioeconomic and demographic variables aside.

RESULTS

Increasing gender equality in domestic work among Finnish couples

Before analyzing the predictive effect of housework division among couples, we present the general trend towards diminishing gender discrepancy in domestic work and child care over three decades using data from Finnish time use surveys in 1988, 1999 and 2010.

Overall, Finnish women continue to do much more domestic work than do men (Table 1). However, during recent decades women have decreased and men have increased their time spent on domestic work. Although the gender gap has also diminished among parents, the birth of a child still increases women's unpaid work considerably, and mothers contribute almost 1.4 times more housework hours compared to fathers.

Table 1. Time spent in total housework and in child care in 1988, 1999 and 2010. Finnish men and women (parents and childless persons aged 20-60), h:min/day.

		Men			Women		
		1988	1999	2010	1988	1999	2010
Housework	Parents	2:06	2:08	2:15	3:48	3:38	3:15
	Childless	1:57	2:00	2:03	3:08	3:05	2:52
	All	2:00	2:03	2:07	3:27	3:19	3:01
Childcare	Parents	0:33	0:42	0:57	1:22	1:31	1:50

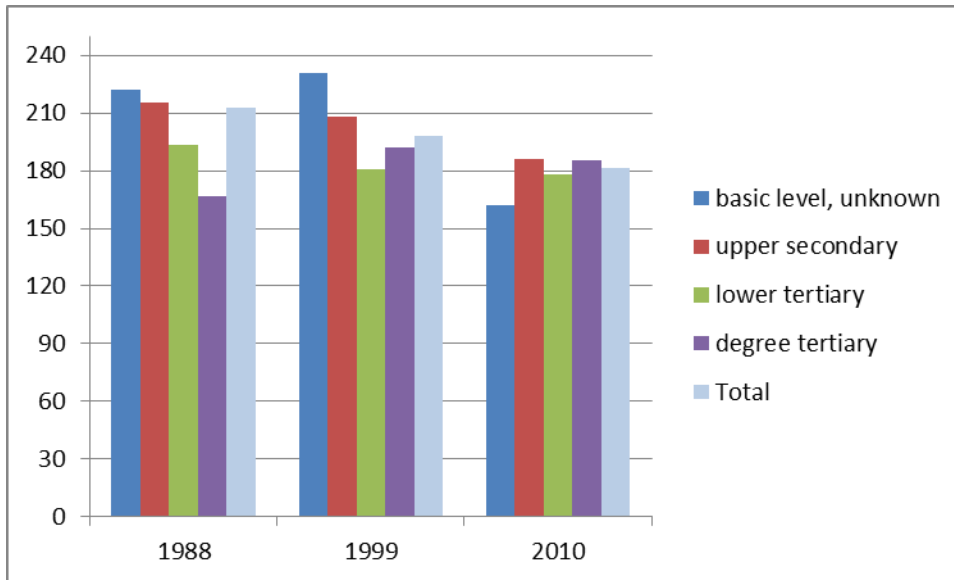
Source: Finnish TUS1988, TUS1999 and TUS2010 (authors' calculations).

Women's domestic work correlates negatively with educational degree, while the reverse is true for men, with two exceptions. First, in the most recent TUS wave (2010) women's time spent on domestic work shows very small if any differences by education. Especially interesting here is the strong reduction in time spent on housework among women with low level of education. Second, men with the highest level of education do less compared to men with the second highest

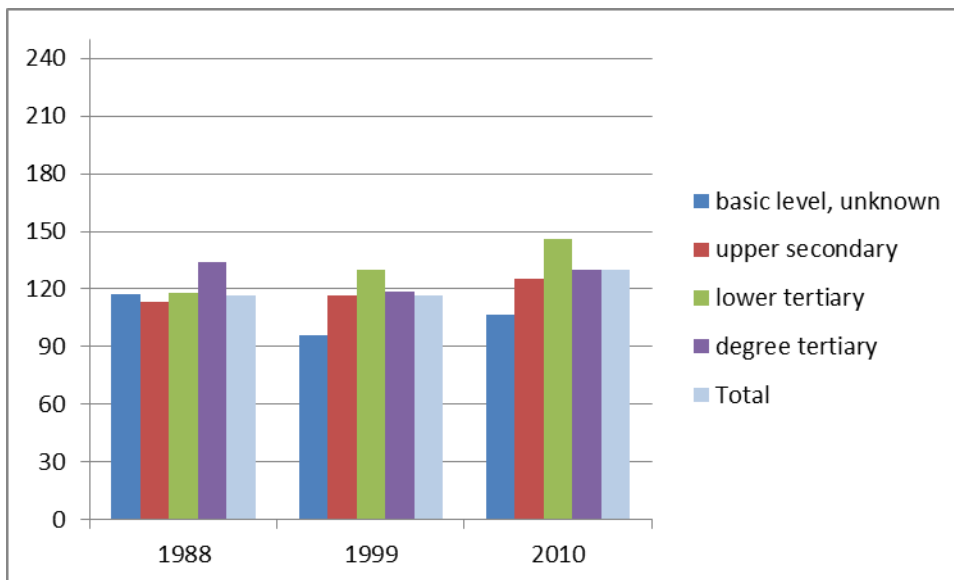
educational level (Figures 1a-b). This may be explained by the fact that high SES men also tend to do very long working hours and/or to be able to employ domestic help.

Figure 1a-b. Housework hours (min/day), total housework. Employed women and men with child(ren) below 11 yrs.

1a. Total housework hours (min/day). Employed women with child(ren) below 11 years of age.



1b. Total housework hours (min/day). Employed men with child(ren) below 11 years of age.

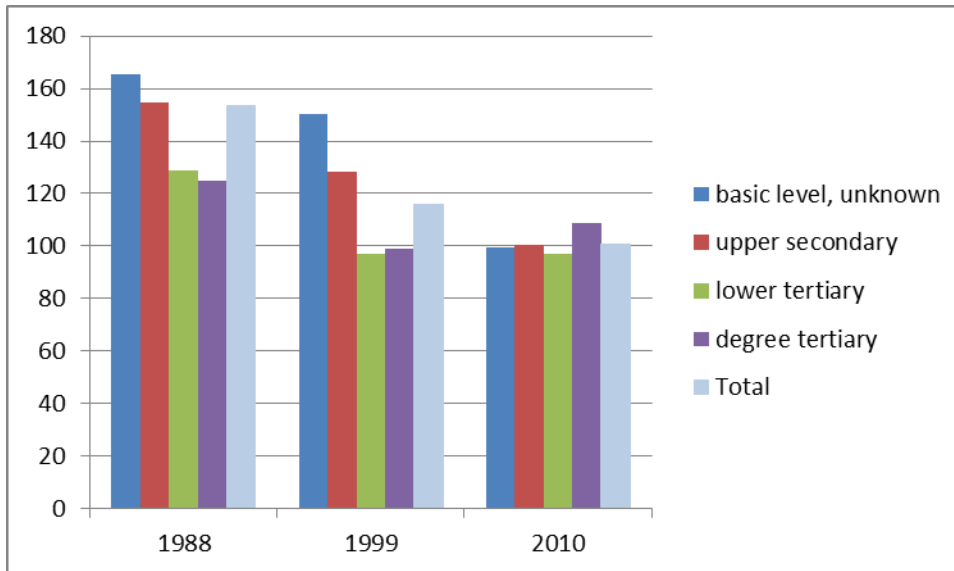


Source: Finnish TUS1988, TUS1999 and TUS2010 (authors' calculations).

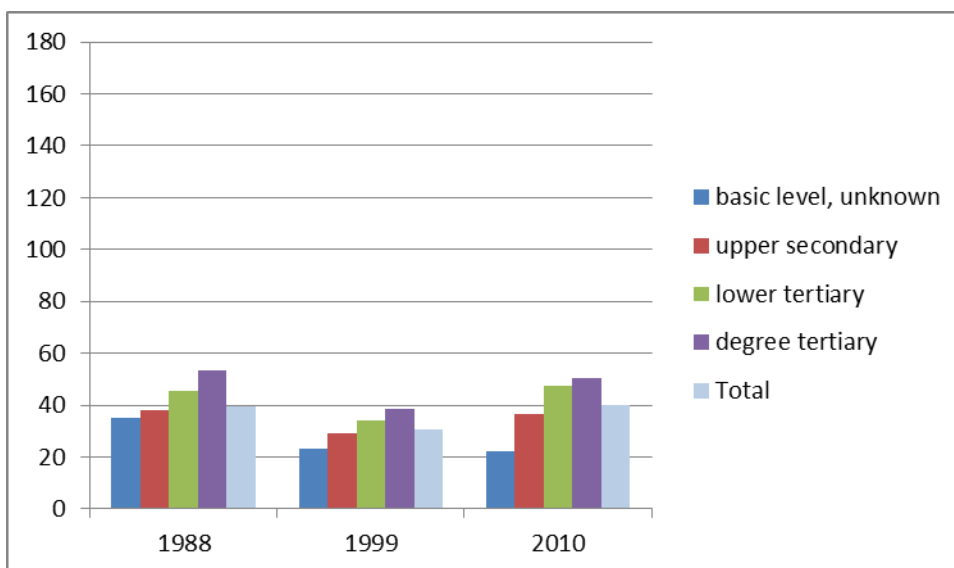
The same picture emerges even more distinctively when we study so-called "female" tasks, such as preparing for meals, cleaning, washing, etc. Women have reduced their time drastically in the last two decades, and this is especially true for women with low education who used to do much more than more highly educated women. Among men, "female" tasks correlate positively with educational level. (Figures 2a-b)

Figure 2a-b. Housework hours (min/day), everyday (“female”) tasks. Employed women and men with child(ren) below 11 yrs.

2a. Time spent in everyday tasks (min/day). Employed women with child(ren) below 11 years of age.



2b. Time spent in everyday tasks (min/day). Employed men with child(ren) below 11 years of age.



Source: Finnish TUS1988, TUS1999 and TUS2010 (authors' calculations).

In child care, both women and men have increased their time use (Table 1). The increase is stronger among men even if women still devote more time caring for children. Both sexes tend to spend more time with their children if they have more education, but there are exceptions: in 2010, mothers and fathers with least education spent more time caring for their children than did parents with the second lowest educational level (figures not shown).

Division of housework and childbearing

Does a more egalitarian division of labour in the family also increase fertility? On the basis of the theoretical discussion and previous empirical findings, we expected that couples who share domestic responsibilities more evenly would be more likely to proceed to a (next) birth. However, our findings paint a different picture.

Table 2 presents the results from a model which includes woman's housework hours (all housework), man's share of the housework and socioeconomic and demographic control variables. We illustrate the impact of the division of housework here by presenting only the results for 'total housework'. However, when focusing on housework hours or men's share of 'everyday ("female") tasks', the results were basically the same.

Contrary to our expectations, men's relative contribution to housework and a more egalitarian division of domestic tasks did not elevate the odds of a birth significantly in any of the models considered (In the Table 2 we present only final models including all control variables). Men's share in everyday or "female" tasks did not have any significant effect on childbearing either (tables not shown). When we added a squared term of the man's share into the models, his share (squared) was weakly significant among employed women, and among women with two children. With regard to the time men spent in housework - either in all housework, or separately in everyday tasks - did not have any significant effect on continued childbearing (tables not shown).

Interestingly, increasing housework hours (by ten minutes per day) among women decreased the odds of a birth by four to eight percent. The impact was more pronounced among mothers of one child, as well as among employed mothers of 1-2 children (Table 2). The impact of the woman's housework time on subsequent childbearing was similar in all educational groups of women (tables not shown). Neither were there any marked differences between parities, or whether we focused only on employed women.

The negative effect of more housework on fertility was found for all amounts of housework, but was especially clear among women who did more than 200 minutes per day. Among mothers, there was no particular threshold. Women who spent more time on housework did more of all kinds of housework. They also tended to give more time to child care, until domestic work took more than 200 minutes a day, at which point the proportion of child care share started to decrease. Women doing much domestic work were more likely to have a spouse working as an entrepreneur, but controlling for spouse's occupation did not change, or eliminate the association between amount of housework and fertility. The husband's of women spending much time in housework were also somewhat more likely to do little housework (only a 1-15 % share) themselves. However, the association between the woman's housework hours and fertility was not explained by the contribution of her spouse to domestic work.

Thus men's relative contribution to housework does not appear to have any impact on realized childbearing among Finnish couples. Although the association between men's greater share of domestic tasks and continued childbearing is positive, it failed to be significant in all the models considered here. The impact of housework variables did not change markedly with the inclusion of variables measuring women's socioeconomic resources. Notably, they remained the same even

Table 2. Men's share of housework, woman's housework time (10 min/day) and transition to first, second or third birth. Logistic regression analyses. Housework=total housework

	0 children		1 child		2 children		0-2 children		0-2 children, employed/student women		1-2 children		1-2 children, employed/student mothers	
	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p
Man's share of housework	1.01	.429	1.01	.683	1.05	.141	1.01	.526	1.01	.358	1.02	.272	1.03	.414
Man's share squared	1.00	.253	1.00	.904	0.99	.043	1.00	.176	1.00	.064	1.00	.198	0.99	.199
Woman's time use (10 min/day)	0.96	.036	0.92	.080	0.96	.059	0.95	.001	0.95	.001	0.95	.027	0.92	.003
Education														
Both low	0.51		0.32		0.29		0.35		0.36		0.30		0.10	
Woman-low. man-high	0.37		0.68		1.49		0.48		0.48		0.99		2.28	
Woman-high. man-low	1.73		0.81		0.03		0.63		0.75		0.19		0.09	
Both high (ref.)	1.00	.070	1.00	.505	1.00	.007	1.00	.021	1.00	.054	1.00	.016	1.00	.016
Woman's activity														
Woman: not working	0.45		0.61		1.23		1.10		-		0.83		-	
Woman: studying	0.35		1.28		-		0.35		0.24		1.00		6.16	
Woman: working (ref.)	1.00	.188	1.00	.869	1.00	.756	1.00	.199	1.00	0.20	1.00	.369	1.00	.089
Woman's income as of the household income, %														
51+%	0.89		1.11		4.03		1.09		1.23		2.19		6.19	
41-50%	0.92		0.43		0.48		0.59		0.72		0.75		2.88	
31-40%	1.71		0.25		2.17		0.91		1.04		1.04		2.19	
Below 31% (ref.)	1.00	.861	1.00	.279	1.00	.127	1.00	.417	1.00	.696	1.00	.264	1.00	.451
Income data missing	0.99		-		-		0.59		0.45		0.16		-	
Demographic controls														
0 children	-		-		-		0.77		0.70		-		-	
1 child	-		-		-		2.68		2.83		2.41		2.61	
2 children (ref.)	-		-		-		1.00	.001	1.00	.003	1.00	.041	1.00	.131
Age/female	0.84	.000	0.81	.055	0.84	.017	0.81	.000	0.78	.000	0.81	.000	0.68	.000
Age/youngest child	-		0.68	.130	0.68	.008	-		-		0.72	.008	0.55	.004
Married	2.11		1.00		0.34		1.37		0.98		0.71		0.26	
Cohabiting (ref.)	1.00	.158	1.00	.999	1.00	.098	1.00	.365	1.00	.957	1.00	.481	1.00	.042
N (diary days)	352		203		313		876		684		524		373	

when we investigated the impact of housework hours and the division of domestic tasks separately for women with low or with high level of education.

In Table 3 we present a summary of the results from models examining the impact of child-care time on the transition to a next child among parents of 1 or 2 children. Women's child-care hours are not related to having a second or a third child (although when examined separately without the inclusion of men's share, women's child-care hours were positively associated with childbearing among mothers with two children), nor are those of the male partner (men's hours not shown). A bigger relative contribution from the father elevates the second and third birth risks slightly. However, the impact is significant only when we pooled parities and introduced a squared term of men's relative contribution. Father's bigger share of child-care time first increases, and then decreases the odds of a subsequent birth.

Table 3. Men's share of child-care time, women's child-care time (10 min/day) and transition to a second or a third birth. Logistic regression analyses.

	1 child		2 children		1-2 children		1-2 children, employed mothers	
	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p	ExpB	p
Woman's child-care time (10 min/day)	0.99	.786	1.03	.304	1.01	.603	1.05	.125
Man's share of child-care time	1.05	.162	1.04	.238	1.04	.069	1.04	.262
Man's share, squared	0.99	.170	0.99	.073	0.99	.014	0.99	.118
N (diary days)	204		313		516		373	

DISCUSSION

Many scholars suggest that once the gender revolution is completed, and the level of equity in private life catches up with that in education and employment, fathers will share housework and child care and thus diminish the current costs of childbearing for mothers (eg Goldscheider 2000; McDonald 2000a and 2000b; Esping-Andersen 2007). This can be expected to lead to higher numbers of children, especially for couples who have none or only a few. However, to date few studies have assessed how men's and women's actual and self-reported contribution to child care and domestic work predict subsequent fertility, and existing evidence is inconclusive.

We hypothesized that higher gender equality would promote childbearing among Finnish couples. This was true, in the sense that smaller female contribution to domestic work – in terms of hours spent in housework – was significantly associated with a higher risk of a subsequent birth. However, no similar effect was found among men who did a higher share of domestic work.

The negative effect of women's domestic work on fertility was not particular for special type of domestic work or any educational group, nor was it explained by their husband's occupation or his share in domestic work.

Our result concerning men's contribution are in the line with some recent findings (Cooke 2004; Nilsson 2010; Schoeber 2012) finding no or a very small impact of male contribution at home on

fertility. We are unaware of similar results concerning women's time use. Due to the nature of our data, we can here only speculate about the mechanisms behind our finding.

Our main result is counterintuitive when considering that traditional women, who can be expected to do more housework, have been shown to have more numbers of children. This does not appear to be the case in today's Finland. A previous study with survey data on 0 and 1 parity adult Finns found that Finnish women with traditional gender attitudes did not intend to have more children than did other women. Instead, mothers with egalitarian values showed signs of having higher childbearing ideals and intentions. To the extent that gender traditionalism is associated with time spent in domestic work, our study provides evidence in the same direction. Negative impact of housework hours on childbearing may be related to satisfaction towards the division of tasks in the family: a previous study found that women with low level of education – who often did more housework than other women – were the least satisfied with the division of domestic work (Miettinen 2008).

Research on personality traits also show that Finnish women who score high on dominance are more likely to have children (Jokela and Keltikangas-Järvinen 2009). Women who are neurotic or very conscientious also tend to have a lower risk of childbearing (Jokela et al. 2011). With suitable data in the future, it would be interesting to test whether the personality traits associated with lower fertility are also related to time spent in housework, and perhaps could explain the decreased likelihood of continued childbearing among women who do much housework.

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Appendix Table 1. Proportion of couples having a child over subsequent five years after TUS1999, mean housework time women/men, men's share of total housework time and socioeconomic controls, couples by number of children in 1999. Weighted estimates and distributions (note that distribution of socioeconomic variables is based on the diary days).

	0 children	1 child	2 children
Proportion of couples having a (next) child over 5 years (%)	37.7	43.2	21.8
Mean housework hours (min/day), men	83.6	76.2	89.7
Mean housework hours (min/day), women	125.8	157.7	189.3
Men's share of housework time, mean (%)	37.9	29.6	30.5
Socioeconomic variables			
Woman employed	65.6	62.9	69.4
Woman studying	21.8	4.3	4.3
Woman not employed/studying	12.6	32.8	26.2
Woman's income as a percentage of household income			
Below 31%	25.2	25.9	31.0
31-40%	16.5	25.7	24.5
41-50%	21.4	25.2	26.0
51+%	28.6	19.2	17.8
Data on income missing	8.2	3.9	0.7
Educational level of the partners			
Both low	55.3	49.1	44.7
Woman low - man high	9.5	12.5	8.5
Woman high - man low	19.2	18.6	21.3
Both high	16.0	19.8	25.5