

# Housework sharing among older couples: explaining the gendered division of domestic labour in older age in South Korea

Research Article

## Housework sharing among older couples: explaining the gendered division of domestic labour in older age in South Korea

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### ABSTRACT

Our study investigates the relationship between family models and housework division among older couples. Using the 2019 Korean Time Use Survey, we analysed wives' share of housework in four family

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# What do we know?

- In housework research: most research is done on working-age adults
- Moreover, most economic resources based theoretical explanations are also implicitly have working-age people in mind, and are usually tested on working-age people.

# Resource-based theories

**1**

**Time availability**

**2**

**Relative-resources**

**3**

**Absolute-resources**

But what about older adults?

# Gender-based theories

- **Gendering processes:** through the process of gendering women take on more housework responsibility
- **Gender ideology/attitudes:** women with more egalitarian gender attitudes do less housework

# **What else could matter in older age?**

- **Health, obviously**
- **Not much theory about it in sociological studies of housework**
- **Medical studies: look at reverse link. Do more housework, be healthier.**

# Data

- **2019 Korean Time Use Survey**
- **12,388 households (26,091 individuals aged ten years and older) and 52,182 diary days.**
- **Two consecutive days**
- **The final analytical sample: 6,256 diaries (person-days), including responses for two days for 1,564 women and 1,564 men in couples, where at least one is  $\geq 65$  y.o.**
- **Diadic data --> kept for women only**

# Main Variables

- **Dependent Variable: wife's housework share.**  
Housework: meal preparation, dishes, laundry, garbage disposal and recycling, shopping, etc.
- **Independent variable: family model: dual-earner, husband-breadwinner, wife-breadwinner, and retired (both not working).**

# Control Variables

- Income (midpoints), including pension, social security benefits, and assets.
- Attitudes: both traditional (reference), only husband traditional, only wife traditional, and both egalitarian.
- Health: both good health (reference), only husband poor health, only wife poor health, and both poor health.
- Age, education - 4 groups (HS or higher), homeownership, weekends.



# Descriptives #1

**Table 1. Mean/proportions (SD) of main variables.**

	All <i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Dual earners <i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Husband- breadwinner <i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Wife- breadwinner <i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Retired <i>Mean</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Wife's Housework Time	208.108 (111.590)	184.401 (108.156)	228.324 (110.383)	176.246 (112.285)	219.145 (110.062)
Wife's Housework Share	79.542 (22.827)	81.293 (22.090)	83.549 (21.581)	71.797 (27.210)	78.712 (22.084)
Husband's Housework Time	57.131 (76.365)	42.783 (64.206)	48.162 (72.307)	77.028 (95.875)	63.816 (76.913)
Husband's Housework Share	19.685 (22.492)	17.317 (20.936)	15.977 (21.568)	27.643 (27.277)	20.655 (21.867)
<b>Individual Level</b>					
Wife's Age	69.139 (6.384)	66.990 (5.578)	67.646 (5.988)	67.482 (5.799)	71.316 (6.398)
Husband's Age	73.257 (5.976)	71.280 (5.154)	71.300 (5.278)	72.814 (5.167)	75.261 (6.195)
Wife's Income <sup>a</sup>	70.673 (66.099)	82.274 (61.998)	65.854 (99.022)	105.700 (64.380)	58.369 (42.125)
Husband's Income <sup>a</sup>	137.685 (141.638)	162.129 (125.727)	228.177 (195.939)	90.531 (127.815)	96.168 (94.352)
Wife: High-School Graduate	0.331 (0.471)	0.230 (0.421)	0.329 (0.470)	0.333 (0.472)	0.384 (0.487)
Husband: High-School Graduate	0.500 (0.500)	0.402 (0.491)	0.547 (0.498)	0.432 (0.496)	0.546 (0.498)
Wife's Traditionalism	0.372 (0.483)	0.348 (0.477)	0.450 (0.498)	0.275 (0.447)	0.373 (0.484)
Husband's Traditionalism	0.525 (0.499)	0.517 (0.500)	0.615 (0.487)	0.356 (0.480)	0.529 (0.499)
Wife's Health <sup>b</sup>	0.159 (0.366)	0.125 (0.331)	0.162 (0.369)	0.180 (0.385)	0.170 (0.376)
Husband's Health <sup>b</sup>	0.132 (0.338)	0.083 (0.277)	0.069 (0.254)	0.253 (0.435)	0.156 (0.363)

# Descriptives #2

## Couple Level (Proportions)

### Education:

Both High School	0.307 (0.461)	0.205 (0.404)	0.326 (0.469)	0.297 (0.458)	0.354 (0.478)
Husband High School	0.193 (0.395)	0.198 (0.398)	0.221 (0.415)	0.135 (0.343)	0.192 (0.394)
Wife High School	0.024 (0.153)	0.025 (0.157)	0.002 (0.047)	0.037 (0.188)	0.030 (0.170)
Both Not High School	0.476 (0.500)	0.573 (0.495)	0.450 (0.498)	0.531 (0.500)	0.424 (0.494)

### Traditionalism

1. Both Traditional	0.278 (0.448)	0.241 (0.428)	0.376 (0.485)	0.162 (0.369)	0.282 (0.450)
2. Husband Traditional	0.247 (0.431)	0.275 (0.447)	0.239 (0.427)	0.195 (0.396)	0.247 (0.432)
3. Wife Traditional	0.094 (0.292)	0.106 (0.309)	0.075 (0.263)	0.113 (0.317)	0.091 (0.288)
4. Both Egalitarian	0.381 (0.486)	0.377 (0.485)	0.311 (0.463)	0.531 (0.500)	0.380 (0.485)

### Health

Both Poor Health	0.053 (0.224)	0.030 (0.171)	0.035 (0.183)	0.107 (0.309)	0.060 (0.237)
Husband Poor Health	0.079 (0.269)	0.053 (0.225)	0.034 (0.182)	0.146 (0.354)	0.096 (0.294)
Wife Poor Health	0.106 (0.308)	0.095 (0.293)	0.127 (0.334)	0.073 (0.261)	0.110 (0.313)
Both Good Health	0.762 (0.426)	0.822 (0.383)	0.804 (0.398)	0.674 (0.470)	0.735 (0.442)

**Table 2.** OLS regression full results.

	(1) Wife's Housework Ratio	(2) Wife's Housework Ratio
<b>Family models</b>		
Dual earners	Ref.	Ref.
Husband-breadwinners	2.256 (1.726)	1.981 (1.739)
Wife-breadwinners	-9.496*** (2.511)	-9.271*** (2.552)
Retired	-2.581 (1.473)	-2.235 (1.583)
<del>Individual Level</del>		
<b>Couple Level</b>		
<del>Education:</del>		
<del>Traditionalism</del>		
<b>Health</b>		
Both Good Health		Ref.
Both Poor Health		8.776*** (2.332)
Husband Poor Health		6.744*** (1.886)
Wife Poor Health		-4.388* (2.188)
<b>Other Characteristics</b>		
Homeowners		0.230 (1.966)
Weekends		-0.547 (1.026)
Constant	81.293*** (1.161)	86.128*** (8.762)
Observations (person-days)	3,128	3,128
N (persons)	1,564	1,564
R <sup>2</sup>	0.021	0.048
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.020	0.042

# Results #2

**Table 3. Wife's housework share by family model, unstandardized coefficients.**

	(1) Dual earners	(2) Husband-breadwinner	(3) Wife-breadwinner	(4) Retired
<b>Traditionalism</b>				
Both Traditional	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Husband Traditional	-1.041 (2.937)	2.858 (3.210)	-2.726 (6.202)	5.043* (2.370)
Wife Traditional	1.121 (3.918)	-2.594 (3.765)	-5.377 (7.031)	6.848* (3.477)
Both Egalitarian	-2.007 (2.582)	-3.168 (2.803)	-6.438 (5.328)	0.950 (2.205)
<b>Health</b>				
Both Good Health	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Both Poor Health	1.313 (3.167)	-0.548 (9.184)	16.946** (5.239)	9.055*** (2.715)
Husband Poor Health	-0.593 (4.540)	-0.608 (4.132)	7.576 (4.345)	9.263*** (2.453)
Wife Poor Health	2.724 (2.685)	-7.930* (3.725)	-1.994 (6.618)	-5.182 (3.811)

# Conclusions

- Unequal division of housework persists in older age
- Wive-breadwinner couples: women do less housework
- Apart from time availability (for wive-breadwinner families), neither resource based nor gender attitudes could explain the division of housework.
- However: gendering processes and health matter