

# who does the family work?

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Organizations such as Cooperative Extension see them as an everyday phenomena: "superwomen"—women who combine household responsibilities with employed and/or volunteer work. These women, rather than enlisting the help of other family members, try to do most household tasks themselves. This article shares information on the participation of husbands and children in household work and provides information that will help Extension agents in program planning.

## **New York Study**

To determine the amount of time that family members contribute to household tasks, a study of two-parent, two-child families living in the vicinity of Syracuse, New York, was conducted during 1977. The data from this and an earlier study<sup>1</sup> provide the basis for a 10-year comparison of the division of household work among mothers, fathers, and children.

## *Methodology*

For both studies, trained interviewers collected the data. The time contributed by parents and by children over 6 years old was recorded in 10-minute segments for 2 days for categories of household work, child care, and other activities such as paid work, school, personal care, and leisure. In 1977, 105 families were interviewed compared to 278 families from the 1967 study.

## *Findings*

Covariance analysis was used to determine if the 1977 sample of husbands participated more in household work activities than did husbands in the 1967 sample. After weighting the sample and controlling for hours of employment by both the homemaker and the spouse, ages of both the younger and the older child, and the education of the homemaker, no differences in the time contribution of husbands were found.<sup>2</sup>

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On the average, husbands spent an hour and 40 minutes a day in household work activities in both years. They spent the most time (41 minutes a day) in activities related to house care such as yard work, repair, and cleaning activities (see Figure 1). Nonphysical care of family members and shopping were the activities that ranked second and third in husbands' use of time, each accounting for about 18 minutes a day in both 1967 and 1977.

The wife's employment hours had a significant effect on the amount of time husbands spent in food preparation and dishwashing activities. As the hours of homemakers' employment increased, husbands' time in these two activities increased, although the average time allocated to these activities by husbands is very small (6 and 2 minutes a day, respectively).

The employment hours of the husband had a negative effect on the amount of time he spent in most of the traditional housework activities, but did *not* explain variation in the time he spent in either physical or nonphysical care of family members. Husbands' participation in household work remained the same in each category from 1967 to 1977 with about 78 minutes in traditional housework and about 25 minutes in family care activities.

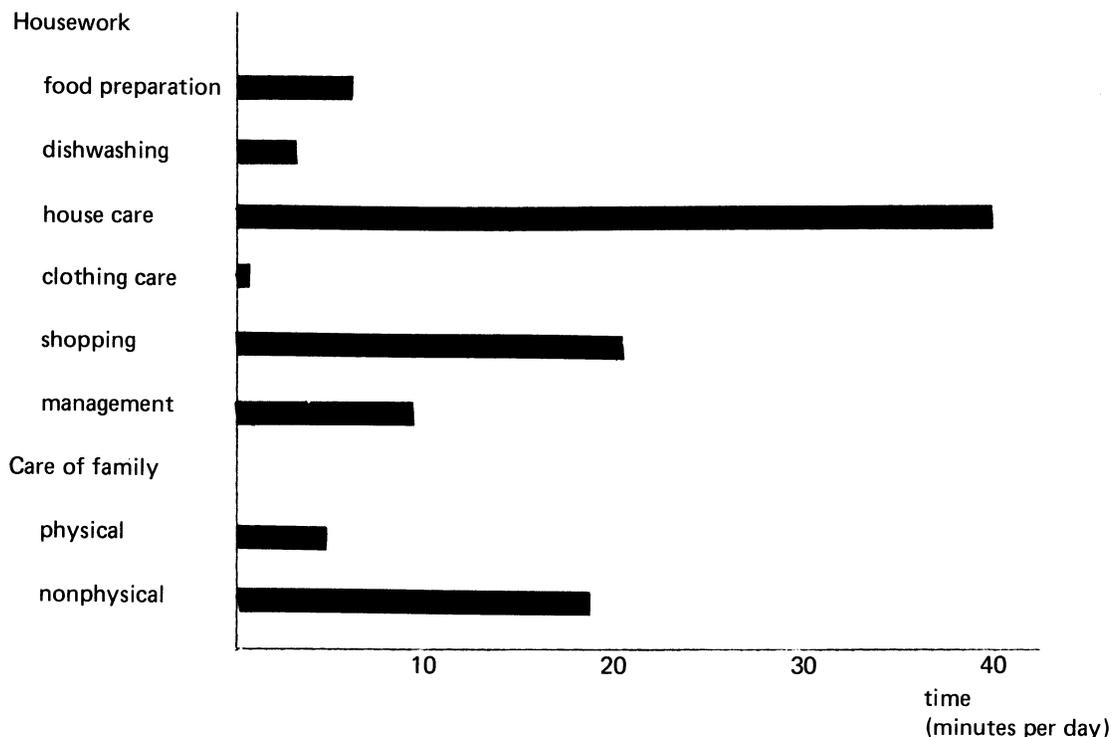


Figure 1. Time spent in household tasks by husbands, 1967-1977.

Children didn't participate more often in household work when the mother was employed. In fact, the more hours both parents were employed, the less time children spent in household tasks. This finding is perhaps due to a lack of parental supervision. Nevertheless, both girls and boys were more likely to spend some time in food preparation and shopping than they did in 1967.<sup>3</sup> However, time in food preparation was short, since they probably made snacks for themselves.

Role differentiation was found in the household activities of children (see Figure 2). Girls were more likely to prepare food, wash dishes, and clean, while boys were more likely to do yard, car, and pet care. The most frequently performed household task for younger girls was housecleaning, while teenage girls more frequently participated in food preparation. Boys more frequently performed housecleaning activities in 1967, while in 1977, 9-to-11 and 15-to-17-year olds were more likely to take part in maintenance of home, yard, car, and pets. Boys were more likely to engage in activities undertaken by fathers, while girls tended to do household tasks done by mothers.

## **Implications for Programming**

### *Program Methods*

According to 1980 census data, 51.6% of American women worked outside the home, compared to 43.4% in 1970 and 37.8% in 1960. It's estimated that 75% of adult women will be employed by 1990.<sup>4</sup> The data in this study confirmed that homemakers continue to perform the majority of household work despite their increased participation in the labor force. With employment and home tasks combined, up to 70 hours a week can be spent before any use of discretionary time is made. Husbands and children, also, often have "too much to do," despite their limited participation in household tasks.

Extension professionals have experienced the effects of changing family roles in their work for some time now: fewer class participants and volunteer leaders available during daytime hours, increased demand for written materials (bulletins, newsletters, home study courses), and expanded weekend and evening services. Many have made role changes in their personal lives as well, such as returning to work after full-time homemaking or becoming part of a two-paycheck family.

In the 1980s, it's essential that Extension program delivery methods and volunteer opportunities be adapted to the needs of dual-worker families. Contrary to popular thought, a recent Gallup poll revealed that employed women are *more likely* to be volunteers than homemakers and that 57% of full-time

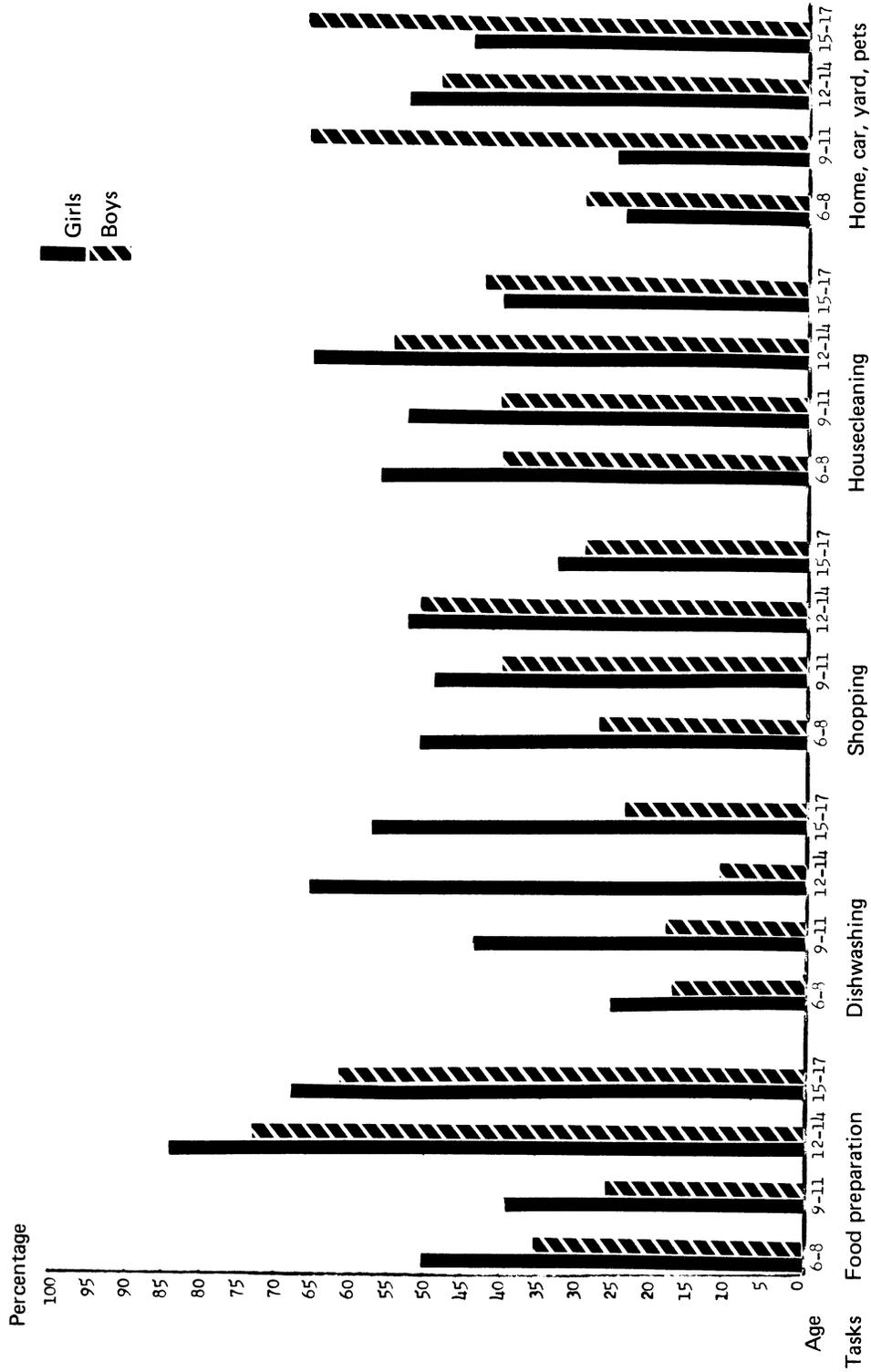


Figure 2. Percentage of girls and boys in 1977 participating in household tasks.

employed people (65% of part-time workers) volunteer their services to at least 1 organization.<sup>5</sup> By structuring tasks so that they can be done on weekends, at night, or at home, with little or no "wasted time," Extension's strong volunteer network will continue.

Some suggested programming methods to reach two-paycheck families include: family camp weekends, lunch-time programs at worksites, a speakers' bureau available to community organizations, weekend classes and/or trips, and nighttime adaptations of previously successful daytime events. Some county advisory groups are also providing scholarships to adult students or establishing babysitting services so parents can more easily attend programs.

*Program  
Content*

Time management information is often requested, especially by employed women with little time available to attend classes on the subject. Home study courses have been successful tools for Extension home economists to reach this audience and help them cope with their dual roles. Some courses in New Jersey have been: "Work Smarter, Not Harder," "Survival for Working Women," and a new series on time management for the employed, preschool mother. Assignments provide hints for prioritizing and simplifying household tasks and suggestions for involving husbands and children. A feedback summary can be mailed to participants at the conclusion of the course as a written "discussion" of participants' reactions to the assignments.

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In New Jersey, a six-part newsletter series, "Financial Planning for Two-Paycheck Families," was introduced in 1981. This newsletter contains information about national trends, money and power, budgeting, retirement planning, insurance savings, and investing and taxes. Other topics that might appeal to this audience include child care, pension plans, and attending college.

If the husbands of employed wives are more likely to do food preparation and cleanup activities, special programs dealing

with quick supper ideas, nutrition, and energy-saving cleanup may find a new audience. The importance of fathers as role models should also be emphasized in parenting classes and newsletters, as should the increased opportunities for conflict in two-paycheck families. Existing value clarification exercises can help Extension professionals explore this issue.

4-H agents may wish to include additional learning experiences in club project outlines that further enhance children's participation in shopping and food preparation. Some examples for both boys and girls may include comparison shopping, quality clothing characteristics, persuasive advertising, the economics of fad and fashion, nutritious snacks, quick lunches, cooking with small appliances (mini cookers, grills, toaster ovens), and microwave oven cooking.

### **Summary**

While many of our Extension clientele have become members of two-paycheck families, research shows that the designation of tasks among family members hasn't changed much in the past decade. Husbands contribute the same amount of time to tasks as they had in the past and sex differences continue to exist in children's performance of tasks.

Many changes, such as those affecting household roles, can cause increased conflict during periods of transition. Extension agents have the knowledge and resources to help our clientele cope with these changes, thereby enhancing the quality of family life. Adaptations in program delivery and content, however, may be necessary.

### **Footnotes**

1. Kathryn E. Walker and M. E. Woods, *Time Use: A Measure of Household Production of Family Goods and Services* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Family of the American Home Economics Association, 1976).
2. Margaret Mietus Sanik, "A Division of Household Work: A Decade Comparison 1967-1977," *Journal of Home Economics Research*, X (December, 1981), 175-80.
3. Barbara O'Neill, "Time-Use Patterns of School-Age Children in Household Tasks: A Comparison of 1967-68 and 1977 Data" (Master's thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1978).
4. Paula W. Dail, "Who Will Mind the Child?" *Journal of Home Economics*, LXXIV (Spring, 1982), 22-23.
5. "American Volunteer, 1981 Gallup Survey on Volunteering," *Voluntary Action Leadership* (Winter, 1982).