



# Sharing of tasks and lifestyle among aged couples

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## Abstract

Family is often thought of as an efficient work unit where tasks are apportioned and shared among the workers. This paper studies the sharing of domestic work in aged families. Do spouses divide tasks between them more evenly than in the middle years now that they have more time? The findings of the Finnish Time Use Survey in 1999/2000 did not support such presumptions about task sharing. The wife of a man who spends a lot of time on domestic work also does a lot of it, both in the middle years and in retirement. Same types of chores, such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, home maintenance or helping another household, are done on the same days. Even in retirement, the wife does the lion's share of domestic work, although certain evening out does happen. The lifestyle of these families is more consistent in free-time activities than in domestic work. The spouses have adopted similar hobbies both at home and outside it. Instead of pursuing their personal choice, they engage in the same hobbies as their spouse. This change begins before the retirement age, for the similarity in time use begins to show clearly already among middle-aged couples.

**JEL-Codes:** D13, J26

**Keywords:** Sharing domestic work, leisure activities, aged

## **Personal remarks to Andy Harvey**

The first time Andy appeared in my life was up on Vitosha Mountain near Sofia where the International Research Group on Time Budgets and Social Activities - previous name of IATUR - arranged the seventh reunion in 1980. I had just arrived to my hotel room and waited for the welcome dinner when a power cut occurred. It continued and I did not have a flashlight with me. I just had to sit in the dark and wait... After a while somebody knocked on the door. It was Andy who accompanied the missing participants to the candlelit restaurant. More experienced travellers had flashlights with them, as well as I after that shocking experience.

The kind and informal atmosphere among time use researchers has its origin in Andy's sociability. When the group was smaller Andy invited the participants for welcome drinks in his suite, told spontaneously where to meet for dinner etc. We can still experience this in IATUR conferences even though the group has grown from 25 in Vitosha to more than 100.

Another expression of Andy's humanity was his reaction when I told about a vague plan for a study trip to U.S. Andy asked why not Halifax. He had just set up a Time Use Research Center at Saint Mary's University. He immediately promised to arrange a workspace and a computer as well as help finding an accommodation. During those three months we worked together on a standard activity classification we presented at the following IATUR conference in Amsterdam. Andy and Dawnie also led me to the very heart of the academic life of Halifax.

A more concrete outcome of this visit was that my son Jyri started next year at the famous art college NSCAD in Halifax and graduated four years later with a degree that brought him a successful job in Helsinki. During Jyri's stay in Halifax Andy and Dawnie offered him a homelike contact, even by representing the family at Jyri's thesis presentation.

Andy arranged the 2005 IATUR conference in Halifax where this article was presented.

## **1 The research problem**

Retirement changes time use. A considerable amount of extra time that can be spent on domestic work, free time activities, sleeping, resting and meals becomes released from gainful work. The family can also decide more freely how they want to use their time.

In terms of time use, pensioner families form a markedly more homogeneous group than the working age population where working life and looking after children influence the lives of families in various ways.

How do spouses use their time when it is no longer dominated by working life? Do they pursue their personal likings or influence each other's time use and participate in similar activities? In other words, does the daily life of spouses grow increasingly dissimilar or alike in retirement?

According to the Time Use Survey, Finnish men aged 65 or over do clearly more domestic work today than they used to. From the 1987-1988 survey to the 1999-2000 survey the amount of time they spend on it increased by as much as 40 minutes (23%) per day, whereas with women it remained unchanged (Niemi and Pääkkönen, 2002, 27-28). When examining the whole population inclusive of people living alone, we can see that the time women and men spend on domestic work evens out along with age so that men aged 75 and over use roughly the same amount of time, three hours and 18 minutes, per day as women of the same age do, which is three hours and 24 minutes (Pääkkönen and Niemi, 2002, 68). This raises the question of whether this is related to having been left alone in life or whether it also applies to couples.

This paper examines the sharing of domestic work in aged households. Domestic work includes general housekeeping and maintenance, shopping and services and care work. How does the total time spent on domestic work vary between households? How do spouses share it? Is it divided equally between the genders now that both have copious time available? Does women's burden of domestic work get lighter in retirement when men could spend more time on domestic work, or does the main responsibility for performing domestic work continue to rest with the wife?

How are the tasks of domestic work divided? Do spouses share the work between them by doing different or same domestic tasks during the same day?

Besides domestic work, this paper also studies how aged couples spend their free time. Do the spouses pursue different interests according to their own, personal likings, or spend their free time engaged similar activities?

## 2 The research data

Aged couples are here defined by the age of the man to include the families where he has reached the official age of old-age retirement of 65. The data obtained from spouses for the same day the Finnish Time Use Survey contained data on 470 shared days. Because the determinant was the age of the man, the data also relate to women aged under 65, from whom data were obtained on 126 days, which accounted for 27% of the diaries kept by women. Most, or 65%, of these women were over 60. Equal proportions, or 9%, of the women and men were employed.

## 3 Time spent on domestic work and its division between the spouses

At first we will see (Table 1) how much time altogether is spent on domestic work in the families and then go on to examine how the families share different domestic tasks. Conventionally, wives have done most of the domestic work, one reason being that the husband has put in longer hours into gainful work while the wife has taken care of most of the unpaid domestic work. How is the total work load divided between the genders when the man reaches retirement age?

### 3.1 Comparing time spent on domestic work by aged and middle-aged couples

We will start by examining how the sharing of domestic work differs between aged couples and couples that are slightly younger and often still participating in working life. For the sake of comparability, we have only included families where the husband is aged 45-64 and there are no children aged under 18. In this article we refer to them as *middle-aged couples or families*.

**Table 1**  
**Time spent on domestic work and its division**  
**between spouses in aged and middle-aged couples**

	Men	Women	Total	Diary days
	(hrs.mins./day)			
Middle-aged couples	2.49	4.10	6.59	899
Aged couples	3.29	4.49	8.18	470
%				
Middle-aged couples	40	60	100	899
Aged couples	42	58	100	470

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

On average, both men and women spend 40 minutes more per day on domestic work in aged couples than in middle-aged couples without children. The division of domestic work between the spouses changes slightly at the retirement age and men's proportion of domestic work goes up from 40 to 42%.

### **3.2 Ageing and time spent on domestic work**

We will next examine how the total time spent on domestic work changes as pensioners grow older. We are comparing here couples representing a younger (man aged 65-74) and an older (man aged over 75) group of pensioners. We have already stated above that women and men aged over 75 use almost equal amounts of time for domestic work if the examination is extended to the entire age group inclusive of people who live alone. Does this also apply to couples, in other words is work divided more equally in older families?

We can see from Table 2 that both men and women spend less time on domestic work as they get older, but that there is no appreciable change in the way it is divided between the spouses. In the age group of the under 75s, men's proportion of the total time the couple spends on domestic work is 42% and in the older age group 43%.

**Table 2**  
**Time spent on domestic work and its**  
**division between aged spouses by age of man**

	Men	Women	Total	Diary days
	(hrs.mins./day)			
65-74	3.35	5.00	8.35	338
Over 75	3.14	4.19	7.33	132
%				
65-74	42	58	100	338
Over 75	43	57	100	132

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

We cannot refer to any clear proportional evening out in the amounts of work, for women still do the lion's share of domestic work even in families where the man is over 75.

Thus, the evening out of the shares of time spent on domestic work that became evident when the total population over the age of 75 was examined does not apply to couples. The wives of the men who are aged over 75 use clearly more time for domestic work than single women aged over 75 do (3 hours and 10 minutes). By comparison, men aged over 75 use the same amount of time for domestic work irrespective of their family status, and the amount is almost the same as it is for single women of the same age. Because single women form the majority in the group of people aged over 75, the amounts of time spent by men and women on domestic work seem to be approaching each other in the oldest age group.

From here on I will be examining aged couples as a single group, because age does not appear to have any appreciable bearing on the division of domestic work among aged couples.

### 3.3 Day of the week and time spent on domestic work

It would be justified to assume that the time use of retired people does not vary much according to the day of the week. Does this also concern weekends, or do they differ from weekdays in respect of the amount of time spent on domestic work? The observation that has been made when examining the whole population is that less domestic work is done during weekdays than during the weekend, when more of it is done on the Saturday than on the Sunday (Niemi and Pääkkönen, 2002, 15). Is this also true with aged couples or do the days of the week grow increasingly alike when people retire?

Aged couples follow a different weekly rhythm on domestic work than people of working age. They do the largest amounts of work on weekdays, slightly less on Saturdays and least of all on Sundays (Table 3). This concerns both men and women. Their weekdays seem to retain the nature of a working day even though they no longer do gainful work. The surplus of time it has left is filled with unpaid domestic work. The nature of Sunday as a day of rest becomes emphasised among pensioners so that they do clearly less domestic work than, for example, on Saturdays.

**Table 3**  
**Time spent by aged couples on domestic work by day of the week**

	Men	Women	Total	Diary days
	(hrs.mins./day)			
Weekdays	3.51	5.08	8.59	235
Saturdays	3.16	4.50	8.06	115
Sundays	1.52	3.10	5.02	120
%				
Weekdays	43	57	100	235
Saturdays	40	60	100	115
Sundays	37	63	100	120

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

The division of work between the genders varies somewhat by the day of the week. Work is most evenly distributed during weekdays, while the traditional division of work steps in on Sundays, which are more clearly days of rest for men than for their wives.

### 3.4 Distribution of time spent on domestic work between spouses

We have examined above the total time spent on domestic work as an average concerning all couples. We will now go on to see how the amounts of domestic work the spouses do affect each other. Do the spouses divide domestic work between them daily so that when one does less of it, domestic work increases for the other, or does domestic work increase for both spouses on the same days? In other words, do the amounts substitute or complement each other (Ruuskanen, 2004)?

The initial hypothesis is that the spouse doing more domestic work, i.e. the wife, adapts to the work input of the spouse doing less of it, i.e. the man. Because the distribution of more detailed domestic activities is very skew, quartiles suit well this kind of an analysis. We have divided retired men into four groups of roughly equal size, or quartiles, according to the amount of time they spend on domestic work. Then we examine differences in the amounts of time the wives in each quartile spend on domestic work on the same day. The point of view is to analyse the women's behaviour from the perspective of the husbands' time use.

Table 4 reveals that on the diary day the time the wife uses for domestic work does not substitute the man's time so that the wife of a man who does a smaller than average amount of domestic work would do a larger than average amount of it. Quite the opposite, on the days when the man has done a larger than average amount of domestic work, the wife, too, has spent more time on it. The correlation in domestic work between spouses is .31\*\*\*<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 4**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time spent by man on domestic work in aged families, all days of the week and weekdays (hrs.mins./day)**

Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on domestic work and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)	Men's average	Women's average	Diary days
<i>All days of the week</i>			
I quartile (0 – 1.10)	0.25	4.02	152
II quartile (1.20 – 3.20)	2.20	4.19	129
III quartile (3.30 – 5.20)	4.25	5.09	103
IV quartile (5.30 +)	7.10	5.52	86
All	3.29	4.49	470
<i>Weekdays</i>			
I quartile (0 – 1.40)	0.38	4.17	65
II quartile (1.50 – 3.40)	2.48	5.02	57
III quartile (3.50 – 5.50)	4.49	5.07	62
IV quartile (6.00 +)	7.27	6.11	51
All	3.51	5.08	235

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

Thus, the amounts of time spouses spend on domestic work do not substitute each other, but are complementary. One could assume this to come from differences between the days of the week, as more domestic work is done on weekdays than at the weekend. However, this does not explain the correlation, because the same effect can also be seen when only weekdays are examined.

The finding is somewhat surprising and it would be fair to presume that it only concerns aged families. People of working age may share domestic work more clearly because they have

<sup>1</sup> \* p<0.05 almost significant, \*\* p<0.01, significant \*\*\* p<0.001 very significant.

less time for it. As regards middle-aged couples, it is especially important to also study weekdays separately.

Middle-aged couples differ from aged ones in that the spouses of the men doing the least amount of domestic work do slightly more of it than the spouses of the men in the second quartile (Table 5). Otherwise, the same phenomenon can be observed as with aged families: the wives of the men who do a lot of domestic work also do more of it than the wives of the men who do little domestic work. This concerns all days of the week and weekdays alike. The correlation in domestic work between middle-aged spouses is .35\*\*\*.

**Table 5**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time spent by man on domestic work in middle-aged families, all days of the week and weekdays (hrs.mins./day)**

<b>Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on domestic work and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>All days of the week</i>			
I quartile (0 – 0.40)	0.15	3.37	225
II quartile (0.50 – 2.00)	1.20	3.20	205
III quartile (2.10 – 4.20)	3.10	4.15	243
IV quartile (4.30 +)	6.45	5.34	226
All	2.49	4.10	899
<i>Weekdays</i>			
I quartile (0 – 0.40)	0.15	3.39	117
II quartile (0.50 – 1.50)	1.17	3.24	111
III quartile (2.00 – 4.10)	3.03	4.07	110
IV quartile (4.20 +)	6.35	5.25	111
All	2.43	4.07	449

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

Thus, the amounts of time aged spouses spend on domestic work seem to complement, rather than substitute, each other. This means that there is no such division of work where the wife would clearly compensate for the man's lesser work input or reduce her own input whenever the man does a lot of domestic work. Instead, both spouses do either a lot or a little domestic work on the same days.

## **4 Participation of spouses in different domestic tasks**

As we have learned above, the total amounts of time spouses spend on domestic work are complementary rather than substitutes. We can, nevertheless, assume that the spouses divide the work between them so that they do different kinds of domestic tasks during the same day.

We will next examine how the spouses share the time spent on the most common tasks, such as cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, doing repairs and maintenance and shopping. Helping other households is included of the less usual domestic work categories.

#### 4.1 Cooking

Cooking is the most time-consuming of the daily domestic work categories. Around one half (48%) of the aged men, but almost all (91%) of the women had participated in cooking during the diary day. We now analyse the hypothesis that either one of the spouses looks after most of the daily cooking, in other words that the days differ so that when the man spends little time for cooking the wife spends a lot of time for it. We are comparing aged and middle-aged couples here in this respect. Here the husband's quartile tells how the wife behaves when he does more cooking. Does she spend less time on cooking on those days?

In aged families, the wife's participation in cooking is connected very little with the amount of time her husband spends on it (Table 6). On the average, the wife spends as much time on cooking in families where the man hardly spends any time on it as she does in families where

**Table 6**  
**Time used by wife relative to time spent by man on the same day on cooking in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on cooking and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
I-II quartiles (0)	0.00	1.16	254
III quartile (0.10 - 0.20)	0.14	1.08	115
IV quartile (0.30+)	1.01	1.14	101
All	0.17	1.14	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
I quartile (0)	0.00	0.52	395
II quartile (0.10)	0.10	0.55	204
III quartile (0.20)	0.20	0.40	102
IV quartile (0.30+)	0.57	0.49	198
All	0.17	0.51	899

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

the man uses the largest amount of time for it. There is no statistically significant correlation ( $r=-.04$ ) between the amounts of time men and women spend on cooking, either.

By comparison, some division of work can be seen in middle-aged families so that the wife spends slightly more time on cooking in the families where the man spends little time on it. The correlation between the amounts of time the spouses use for cooking is  $-.03$ , which does

not, however, support the existence of a clear division of work between the spouses. 56% of the middle-aged men and 88% of the women prepared food on the diary day.

## 4.2 Dish washing

In everyday talk, washing dishes is often used as an example describing the division of domestic work between women and men. However, only 14% of the aged men, but 78% of the women had washed dishes on the diary day. Due to the low participation of men in this task, we are not examining quartiles here but comparing the men who had washed dishes with the men who had not.

The man's participation in dish washing seems to reduce clearly the amount of time his wife spends on it in aged families (Table 7). The correlation between the spouses ( $r = -.17^{**}$ ) is significant.

**Table 7**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time spent by man on the same day on washing dishes in aged and middle-aged families**

Time spent by man on dish washing	Men's average	Women's average	Diary days
<i>Aged couples</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.28	403
Used some time	0.27	0.13	67
All	0.04	0.26	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.16	763
Used some time	0.20	0.16	136
All	0.03	0.16	899

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

By contrast, the time spent on washing dishes does not appear to affect the division of work between the spouses in any way in middle-aged families. The wife uses the same amount of time for it irrespective of whether her husband has washed dishes or not. In these families, 15% of the men and 61% of the women had washed dishes on the diary day. The correlation between the spouses ( $r = -.00$ ) is not statistically significant.

## 4.3 Shopping and services

We are interested here in finding out whether either one of the spouses takes care of daily shopping and services or whether they both do it on the same day.

The amounts of time aged spouses use for shopping and services are fairly similar (Table 8). On the days when the men spend a lot of time on shopping and services, the women also spend a lot of time on them. On the diary day, 51% of the men and 47% of the women had done shopping and services. The correlation is statistically very significant ( $r = .51^{***}$ ). Al-

though this article does not study whether activities are done simultaneously, we can talk about families having shared shopping days.

**Table 8**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time spent by man on the same day on shopping and services in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on shopping and services and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
I-II quartiles (0 - 0.10)	0.00	0.25	265
III quartile (0.20 - 1.20)	0.52	0.40	121
IV quartile (1.30+)	2.28	1.32	84
All	0.46	0.43	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
I-II quartiles (0)	0.00	0.31	498
III quartile (0.10 - 1.00)	0.35	0.39	227
IV quartile (1.10+)	2.17	1.24	174
All	0.38	0.44	899

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

The correlation is very similar among middle-aged couples. Spouses go shopping and run errands on same days. On the diary day, 47% of the men and 55% of the women had done shopping and run errands. The correlation is statistically significant ( $r=.40^{***}$ ) and indicates that spouses also generally go shopping together. This is supported by the finding of Ruuskanen (2004), according to which shopping is the domestic task that people of working age mostly do together with their spouse. Ruuskanen has used the data from the same Time Use Survey to study the simultaneity of activities and spending of time together among spouses.

## 5 Cleaning

One aged man in two and four women in five had cleaned on the diary day. Does either spouse do the daily cleaning or do both spouses do it on the same day?

The amount of time aged women spend on cleaning is almost entirely independent of the amount of time men spend on it (Table 9). Men spending time on cleaning does not mean that women would spend less time on it, almost the opposite. On the days when the man has done a lot of cleaning, the wife has also used more time for it than on the average. The correlation between the spouses is statistically significant ( $r=.21^{***}$ ). This indicates towards the likelihood of shared cleaning days in the family.

**Table 9**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on cleaning in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Time spent by man on cleaning</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples – All days of the week</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.47	250
Used some time	0.55	0.57	153
All	0.22	0.50	470
<i>Middle-aged couples – All days of the week</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.34	483
Used some time	0.38	0.51	416
All	0.17	0.42	899
<i>Weekdays</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.34	254
Used some time	0.34	0.46	195
All	0.15	0.39	449

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

The correlation is clearer with people of working age ( $r=.42^{***}$ ), which could be because weekdays and weekend days are different as far as cleaning is concerned. However, this is not the case because a similar correlation can be observed when only weekdays are examined. The wives of the men who clean on weekdays also spend more time on it. In middle-aged families without children under the age of 18, 45% of the men and 74% of the wives had cleaned during the day.

## **5.1 Repair and maintenance work**

By tradition, repairs and maintenance are men's work. They include here heating and water, home repairs and construction, car maintenance, gardening and pet care.

Even in aged families men do distinctly more home maintenance and construction work than their wives (Table 10). Especially heating and water maintenance, which 29% of the men and 13% of the women did on the diary day, are typically men's work. Men also do clearly more repairs and construction, and car maintenance. However, both spouses participate actively in gardening and pet care. Spouses usually engage in home maintenance on the same days. The correlation can be seen both with retired couples ( $r=.17^{**}$ ) and with couples of working age ( $r=.24^{***}$ ).

**Table 10**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on maintenance work in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Time spent by man on maintenance</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.02	296
Used some time	1.15	0.11	174
All	0.29	0.06	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.03	594
Used some time	1.11	0.08	305
All	0.23	0.04	899

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

## **5.2 Helping other households**

Helping other households refers here to assisting children who have moved away from home, own parents, or other relatives, neighbours, friends or acquaintances. The assistance may be provision of childcare, running errands, or the like.

Spouses are clearly assisting another household on the same days (Table 11). The helping seems to be a joint project in the family. 10% of the men and 12% of the women of retirement age had assisted another household on the diary day. Of the middle-aged respondents included in the comparison, 12% of the men and 15% of the wives had helped people outside their own household on the diary day.

## **5.3 Summary concerning domestic work**

The amounts of time aged spouses spend on domestic work do not substitute but complement each other. If the amount of work to be shared is standardised, the wife of a man who has done little domestic work does not do any more domestic work than the wife of a man who has done a lot of domestic work, as one might assume. Quite the opposite, the amounts of time the spouses spend on domestic work follow each other. If the man has used a lot of time for domestic work, his wife has done so, too. However, this does not eliminate the fact that the amounts of domestic work families do on different days may vary. There are days with high or low emphasis on domestic work, on which the spouses' time use follow each other.

**Table 11**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on assisting neighbours in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Time spent by man on assisting neighbours</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.09	427
Used some time	3.04	0.58	43
All	0.19	0.14	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.08	792
Used some time	2.22	1.18	107
All	0.17	0.17	899

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

The distribution of domestic work varies by task. There is no clear division in domestic work so that the man's increased input into, say, cleaning or shopping and services would reduce the amount of time the wife spends on them. On the contrary, the wives of the men who use a lot of time for cleaning also use more than average time for it on the same day. The complementation is even more pronounced in the time spent on shopping. However, the time the wife spends on cooking is not in any way dependent on the time the man spends on it. Dish washing is the only activity where the amount of time the man spends on it reduces the time the wife spends on it. However, the number of men taking care of dish washing is low, despite the opposite impression created by everyday talk.

The low division of responsibilities not only concerns aged couples but also middle-aged ones without children under the age of 18. The finding reflects the similarity of the spouses' time use. Work is not divided between the spouses according to tasks, but both do the same tasks on the same day. We cannot talk about rational division of domestic tasks but perhaps more aptly about joint performing of domestic work. This examination does not extend to the question of whether domestic work is done together or simultaneously. Among couples of working age, this has been studied by e.g. Ruuskanen (2004), who has observed that especially shopping is an activity that spouses usually do together.

## **6 Spouses' free-time activities**

We have already established that spouses tend to do the same domestic tasks on the same days. In this chapter we will examine whether this uniformity also concerns the use of free time, or whether the spouses then follow their own likings.

Of the free-time activities, I have included four of the most popular, which are television watching, reading, physical exercise and socialising.

## 6.1 Television watching

The time spent on watching television is connected with the amount of available free time (Robinson, 1979). Television is watched most by the population groups that are not gainfully employed. Pensioners are mass consumers of television programmes. We will study here whether spouses influence the amounts of time each one of them spends on watching television.

Almost all aged spouses, 95% of the men and 92% of the women, had watched television on the diary day. The amounts of time they spend on watching television run very parallel (Table 12). On the days when the man has spent a lot of time watching television, his wife has also done so, and spent considerably more time at the television than the wife of a man who has watched little television. The same connection can also be seen in younger families, although the amounts of time they spend on watching television are clearly smaller. The correlations between spouses strengthen this finding, being .63\*\*\* for aged couples and .46\*\*\* for middle-aged ones.

**Table 12**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on watching television in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on watching television and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
I quartile (0 - 1.40)	0.50	1.27	115
II quartile (1.50 - 3.00)	2.30	2.21	115
III quartile (3.10 - 4.20)	3.44	3.10	114
IV quartile (4.50+)	5.48	4.20	126
All	3.11	2.48	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
I quartile (0 - 1.10)	0.26	1.12	244
II quartile (1.20 - 2.10)	1.46	1.50	186
III quartile (2.20 - 3.40)	2.53	2.07	239
IV quartile (3.50+)	5.18	3.02	230
All	2.29	2.00	899

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

Television watching seems to be a shared pastime of spouses. A set that is left on influences the time use of the persons in the same room. Passive listening becomes active watching when something interesting is on or when the minds of the household members are not occupied by some other activity (Robinson, 1979).

## 6.2 Reading

Another typical way of spending time at home is reading, which clearly increases in retirement.

Spouses' reading habits are similar (Table 13). The wife of a man who reads a lot also reads more than the wife of a man who does not read much. This applies to both aged couples (correlation .32\*\*\*) and slightly younger ones (correlation .31\*\*\*).

**Table 13**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on reading in aged and middle-aged families**

Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on reading and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)	Men's average	Women's average	Diary days
<i>Aged couples</i>			
I quartile (0 - 0.20)	0.07	0.40	130
II quartile (0.30 - 0.50)	0.40	0.56	110
III quartile (1.00 - 1.40)	1.14	1.06	116
IV quartile (1.50+)	1.14	1.03	114
All	3.01	1.33	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
I quartile (0 - 0.10)	0.02	0.42	279
II quartile (0.20 - 0.40)	0.29	0.46	227
III quartile (0.50 - 1.10)	0.55	0.54	177
IV quartile (1.20+)	2.25	0.54	216
All	0.59	1.16	889

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

Does the similarity in reading apply to the reading of everything, that is, newspapers, magazines and books? Because of the small distribution we are not examining quartiles here but compare those having read very little or not at all with those having used more time than on the average for reading.

The reading habits of spouses follow each other in respect of both printed media and books (Table 14). This is understandable as regards subscribed and purchased periodicals, but it is surprising that the connection can also be seen in the reading of book.

20% of the women and 15% of the men had been reading a book during the day. Reading newspapers was done as a principle activity during the day by 69% of the aged men and 59% of the women. Reading reflects the spouses' level of education, unlike television watching which almost all aged people do daily. The correlations between the level of general education and reading are statistically significant for aged men ( $r=.21^{***}$ ) and wives ( $r=.23^{***}$ ).

**Table 14**  
**Time used by wife relative to time used by man on the same day for reading printed media and books in aged families**

<b>Man used time for reading versus wife used for reading during the day</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Newspapers</i>			
Little (under 30 mins.)	0.05	0.15	211
A lot (over 30 mins.)	1.08	0.35	204
All	0.35	0.25	470
<i>Periodicals</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.04	439
Used some time	0.43	0.16	31
All	0.03	0.05	470
<i>Books</i>			
Used no time	0.00	0.10	400
Used some time	1.43	0.48	70
All	0.16	0.16	470

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

### **6.3 Physical exercise**

Physical exercise is a pastime that mainly happens outside the home and it would be justified to assume that the spouses do not influence each other's activity in it in the same way they do with the activities that take place at home.

The spouses also seem to be similar in physical exercise (Table 15). This concerns equally pensioners (correlation .43\*\*\*) and younger couples (correlation .42\*\*\*). Some families take more exercise than others, at least as a daily activity.

Does the similarity only concern going for walks, which is easy to do together, or perhaps also more active forms of exercise?

The similarity in physical exercise does not apply to walking as a pastime only but also to more active types of sport (Table 16). The spouses probably take walks together and engage in more active types of exercise on the same day, and partly perhaps even together. Ruuskanen (2004) obtained similar results when examining how couples of working age use their free time together. After socialising with other family members, outdoor exercise was the next most popular free-time activity families did together at weekends.

### **6.4 Socialising**

Socialising includes socialising at home as well as outside the home. Socialising with the family, and friends and relatives, as well as telephone and other conversations are included in the examination when they are entered in the diary as a primary activity. Conversations con-

ducted as a secondary activity to something else, such as during mealtimes, are not taken into account here.

**Table 15**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on physical exercise in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on physical exercise and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
I-II quartiles (0 - 0.10)	0.00	0.24	230
III quartile (0.20 - 1.10)	0.49	0.38	119
IV quartile (1.20+)	2.30	1.13	121
Total	0.49	0.39	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
I – II quartiles (0)	0.00	0.24	434
III quartile (0.10 - 1.20)	0.48	0.37	231
IV quartile (1.30+)	3.03	1.15	234
Total	0.56	0.39	889

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

**Table 16**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on walking and active exercise in aged families**

<b>Man has participated in versus wife spent on exercise (concerned per day)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Walking</i>			
Has not participated	0.00	0.16	283
Has participated	1.07	0.41	187
All	0.26	0.25	470
<i>Active exercise</i>			
Has not participated	0.00	0.06	379
Has participated	1.00	0.27	91
All	0.12	0.10	470

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

The amounts of time spouses spend on socialising run fairly complementary to each other (Table 17). This becomes quite obvious with both aged and middle-aged couples. The correlation between spouses is .67\*\*\* for aged couples and .74\*\*\* for middle-aged couples.

**Table 17**  
**Time spent by wife relative to time used by man on the same day on socialising in aged and middle-aged families**

<b>Quartiles of men by amount of time spent on socialising and quartile parameters (hrs.mins.)</b>	<b>Men's average</b>	<b>Women's average</b>	<b>Diary days</b>
<i>Aged couples</i>			
I-II quartiles (0)	0.00	0.27	230
III quartile (0.10 - 1.00)	0.32	0.39	112
IV quartile (1.10+)	2.39	2.10	128
All	0.47	0.56	470
<i>Middle-aged couples</i>			
I-II quartiles (0)	0.00	0.24	434
III quartile (0.10 - 1.00)	0.29	0.41	228
IV quartile (1.10+)	2.47	2.11	237
All	0.46	0.53	470

Source: Time Use Survey, Statistics Finland, 1999-2000.

The high correlation may come from communication between the spouses (Ruuskanen, 2004). However, the recorded socialising of aged couples mainly consists of conversation with friends and relatives. What is surprising is that although aged couples usually spend a lot of time at home, only 13% of the men and 15% of the women had recorded in the time use diary conversation with another member of the family. Family conversations are quite apparently mainly conducted alongside other activities.

Socialising seems to be a shared activity of the family, indicating that both spouses usually participate in the socialising with friends and relatives.

## **6.5 Summary concerning free-time activities**

As a summary concerning free time we can observe that the ways spouses use it daily are quite similar. This extends to the content more clearly in free-time activities than in domestic work. The highest degree of similarity occurs in socialising and television watching. These are followed by physical exercise and reading. Thus, the choices of the spouses clearly affect each other. The uniformity is not associated with ageing as assumed, for it is clearly observable among both aged and middle-aged couples.

## **7 Conclusions**

This article studies how domestic work is shared in aged families. Do spouses divide tasks between them more equally than in the middle years now that they have more time? Surprisingly, however, the findings do not support this presumption about task sharing. Domestic work is not actually divided but the spouses do it on the same days, maybe even simultane-

ously. Domestic work accumulates to the same days, and perhaps also to the same families. When a man spends more time on domestic work the wife also does a lot of it.

Family is often thought of as an efficient work unit where tasks are apportioned and shared among the workers. However, the time use of aged spouses reflects a situation where time use has become alike. Same types of domestic chores, such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, home maintenance or helping another household, are done on the same days. Even in retirement, the wife does the lion's share of domestic work, although certain evening out does happen.

The lifestyles of families are more consistent in free-time activities than in domestic work. The spouses have adopted similar interests both at home and outside it. Especially socialising is an element that unites the structure of spouses' time use, for it is done together as a couple with friends and relatives. The amounts of time spent on watching television run clearly in the same direction. A physically active person also has a physically active spouse and time uses on reading are very alike. Instead of pursuing their own, personal choices, spouses engage in the same activities. This is observed already before the retirement age, among middle-aged couples.

All in all, the time use of spouses looks surprisingly similar if we examine what each one of them has done during the same day. The spouses may have been much alike to start with, or the similarity in their lifestyles may have evolved over the years. Family seems to have a strong unifying effect. When studying couples of working age, Ruuskanen (2004) observed that the age of the spouses was connected with the analogy of activities. This could mean that similarity in time use increases the likelihood of the marriage continuing. Couples whose lifestyles have not become sufficiently identical may drift apart, whereas those having adopted similar lifestyles are more likely to stay together.

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