

Spouses' shared time in a cross-national context: A comparison of the US, Spain, France, and the Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper investigates spouse's shared time across countries to understand how social conditions and policy are related to married couple's time allocation. To do this, we use time use surveys from four countries with varying social conditions and welfare regimes. We use information about who is present during activities to analyze total time with spouse, time with spouse only and time with spouse and children. We use two surveys from each country to estimate changes over time and compare shared time during periods of economic expansion (around 2000) and periods of recession (around 2010). To our knowledge, this is the first study analyzing couples' time spent together in a cross national context. Our preliminary results comparing USA and Spain show American couples spending less time with a spouse than Spanish couples.

1. Background

Shared time with a spouse is an indicator of marital well-being, and previous research shows that couples desire spending time with their spouse (and children) (Hallberg and Klevmarcken, 2003; Glorieux et al 2011). But the extent to which couples can spend time together depends on work and family arrangements. In the last five decades, families have changed; specifically, dual-earner couples have become much more common and the male breadwinner model has become much less prominent (Bianchi et al 2006, Gershuny, 2000). At the same time, marriages and families have been influenced by other phenomena such as the delay in the age of marriage and the rise of divorce and non-marital cohabitation (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Kennedy and Ruggles, 2013; Smock, 2000). All of these changes have transformed the daily lives of families and have affected time that couples spend together and with their children.

Evidence shows that in the United States time with children has increased for men and women in the last decades (e.g., Sayer, 2005; Bianchi et al 2006). Women are primarily responsible for caregiving activities, while men have become increasingly involved in child care activities, especially those less routine and more interactive activities (Pleck, 2010; Craig and Mullan, 2010). Consensus regarding time with spouse is not as clear. Studies carried out in different countries show that dual-earner couples spend less time with their spouse than male breadwinner couples (Flood and Genadek, 2014 for USA; Glorieux, 2011 for Belgium; Garcia Roman, 2013 for Spain) and shared time alone together is lower when couples have children (Barnet Verzat et al 2009). However studies over time are more contradictory. Dew (2009) found for couples in the US that shared time in 2003 is lower than in 1975. On the other hand, Voorpostel et al (2009) found that partners spend more time together in leisure now than 40 years ago, which they consider an indication of the transformation of intimacy. Similarly, Genadek et al (2014) found that time with a spouse hasn't decreased since 1965; rather, it is higher now than it was in 1965 and it would have increased more were it not for demographic changes in the population.

Examination of couples' shared time in cross-national context is relatively unexplored. Although there are studies comparing time spent with children in cross-national context (e.g., Sayer, Gauthier, & Furstenberg, 2004; Craig & Mullan, 2012), to our knowledge there are no studies of spouse's shared time using an international comparative perspective. Patterns of couples' shared time may be influenced not only by their own attitudes and preferences for shared time but also differences in the larger social context. A cross-national comparison may shed light on the ways in which work and family and other sociodemographic characteristics shape couples' shared time. Our study contributes to the literature by examining cross-national variation in work and family demands on spouses' shared time in four countries – the United States, Spain, France, and the Netherlands – each with different policy contexts. Additionally, we also consider the impact of different economic conditions within and across countries on married couples' shared time by using two time points for each country.

In this paper we answer the following research questions:

1. How does the amount of time married couples time spent alone together and total time differ across countries?
2. Do the type of activities and amount of time spent in activities together vary for couples in different countries?
3. How does the relationship between couples' shared time and work and family arrangements vary across countries?
4. How do economic conditions within and across countries impact the amount of time couples spend together?

2. Data & Methodology

Time diary surveys generally collect data about activities carried out during a 24-hour period. Questions differ between surveys but information about the main activity, secondary activity and with whom the activity is done is usually collected. Demographic and socioeconomic information about respondents (and sometimes all household members) is also collected.

Our selection of countries is both strategic and practical. Variation in social and policy environments is important for our analysis, and we have selected countries that vary on these dimensions. But the selection is also based on the availability of and access to data. For our analysis of couples' shared time, data must be collected on the co-presence of others during the activity. Also, our consideration of changes between roughly 2000 and 2010 requires that we have two data points per country. Given these conditions, we present preliminary results for USA and Spain and we also have data from France and Netherlands, which we will incorporate by the PAA meetings. Depending on the availability of additional data from the Centre for Time Use Research at the University of Oxford, we may add data from Finland, South Korea, Italy and/or Canada.

Data for the USA is from the American Time Use Survey. This survey started in 2003 and has been conducted annually. The sample is comprised of a subset of households that previously participated in the Current Population Survey. For each household one member is selected to complete the time diary. Respondents report the main activity, when the activity starts and ends, and the co-presence of household members and non-members.

The European Time Use Survey countries follow the guidelines of Eurostat and their periodicity differs between countries. The majority of countries conducted a survey around 2000 and another around 2010. According to the guidelines all the members of the household 10 years old or older must complete a time use diary with all their activities spanning 24 hours. The information is collected using a diary of activities where each person reports their activities in 10 minute intervals. In addition to the main activity, the respondent specifies the presence during the activity of their spouse, any child under 10 years old, other members of the household or known

non-household members. In the 2010 French data, each respondent completed a time diary on a weekday and another on a weekend day. The time use survey for Spain in 2002-2003 did not include the question about the presence of the spouse. However the survey questionnaire asked about the presence of children under 10 and the presence of members of the household.

For comparability reasons, we must limit our sample in the following ways. First, we include only heterosexual couples aged 20-65 in which one member is working for pay because we want to examine how different paid work arrangements contribute to spouses' shared time. Second, because the Spanish 2002-2003 data did not collect detailed co-presence information, we must limit our sample to be sure that the respondent is with the spouse. For this reason, we include couples without children or couples with children under age 10. Couples who have children older than 10 or who live with other adults are excluded from our analysis. Table 1 shows sample sizes and percentages of the US and Spanish data.

Table 1. Sample sizes and percentages within sample of time diary data from the USA and Spain.

| | | USA | | Spain | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | 2003 | 2010 | 2002-03 | 2009-10 |
| Dayweek | Weekday | 2399 48.6 | 1294 49.3 | 4024 66.6 | 1940 60.5 |
| | Weekend | 2539 51.4 | 1330 50.7 | 2018 33.4 | 1266 39.5 |
| Sex | Male | 2443 49.5 | 1287 49.0 | 3021 50.0 | 1603 50.0 |
| | Female | 2495 50.5 | 1337 51.0 | 3021 50.0 | 1603 50.0 |
| Employment status | Dual earner couple | 3257 66.0 | 1693 64.5 | 3212 53.2 | 1822 56.8 |
| | Male breadwinner couple | 1492 30.2 | 805 30.7 | 2518 41.7 | 1032 32.2 |
| | Female breadwinner couple | 189 3.8 | 126 4.8 | 312 5.2 | 352 11.0 |
| N | | 4938 | 2624 | 6042 | 3206 |

We have three dependent variables in our analysis. First, *total time with a spouse* indicates the minutes per day spent in the presence of a spouse. Second, *spousal time* corresponds to the minutes per day that a spouse and no one else was present. Third, *family time* indicates the minutes per day spent with a spouse and a child at the same time.

3. Preliminary results for Spain and USA

First, we present descriptive statistics for each measure of time with spouse for every country and year included in the study separately for non-parents and parents (Table 2). Time with a spouse is higher in Spain than in USA for both total time with a spouse and spousal time. For couples without children, total time with a spouse was around 5 hours per day in Spain in 2003 and approximately 20 minutes less in USA. In 2010, total time with a spouse didn't change substantially in USA, but it increased by about 1 hour in Spain so the gap is larger. The rise is mainly due to an increase in time alone with one's spouse.

Total time with a spouse among Spanish couples with children is similar to total time for couples without children. Differences are observed in the USA, where reported time with one's spouse is 30 minutes less for mothers and 20 minutes less for fathers compared to couples without children. For parents, differences in the US between 2003 and 2010 are very small. In Spain, parents in 2010 are spending nearly half an hour more together compared to in 2003, and the increase is mainly due to an increase in time with children.

Table 2. Spouses' average shared number of daily minutes

| <i>Couples with children under age 10</i> | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|
| | | Women | | | Men | | |
| | | Family time | Spousal time | Total time with spouse | Family time | Spousal time | Total time with spouse |
| Spain | 2003 | 210.2 | 85.6 | 305.6 | 198.3 | 89.5 | 298.4 |
| | 2010 | 242.3 | 79.8 | 329.1 | 242.1 | 82.7 | 331.6 |
| USA | 2003 | 177.8 | 66.8 | 252.9 | 189.7 | 66.0 | 261.4 |
| | 2010 | 179.5 | 67.9 | 253.7 | 192.2 | 62.9 | 262.6 |

| <i>Couples without children</i> | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|------|------------------------|--|--|------------------------|--|--|
| | | Women | | | Men | | |
| | | Spousal time | | | Spousal time | | |
| | | Total time with spouse | | | Total time with spouse | | |
| Spain | 2003 | 238.6 | | | 232.6 | | |
| | 2010 | 292.7 | | | 279.3 | | |
| USA | 2003 | 228.9 | | | 236.3 | | |
| | 2010 | 228.9 | | | 226.4 | | |

4. Next steps

Our plans for moving forward are as follows. First, we will incorporate the French and Dutch data. Then, we will analyze differences in spouses' shared time based on couple-level work arrangements, educational attainment, and day of the week. Second, we will look at specific activities to better understand *what* couples are doing together varies across time and place. We

will estimate OLS models for our three dependent variables separately for each country to assess the extent to which work and family arrangements shape couples' shared time. Finally, we will use variation in economic conditions within and across countries over the period to estimate the influence of macro level conditions on the time spouses spend together.

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