How Couples Divide Labor: Evidence from 33 Countries

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Women's participation in the paid labor force varies tremendously across the world. Depending on the country, anywhere between 15 and 88 percent of the women over the age of 15 are economically active (World Bank 2013). But the story of how couples divide their labor is at best half-told by examining market work because housework and childcare are also necessary the world over. We follow Goldscheider and her colleagues (2014) in positing the growth in female labor force participation as the first half of a profound gender revolution that has progressed at varying paces throughout the world. During the first half of the gender revolution, women have increasingly joined men in the public sphere by participating in market work. The second half of the gender revolution would be men will join women by working in the private sphere of the family (Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegård 2014); however, it is unclear how closely these trends relate to each other in different countries and regions.

Although there have been cross-national studies of how housework (Kan, Sullivan and Gershuny 2011) and child care (Gauthier, Smeeding and Furstenberg 2004; Neilson and Stanfors 2014) are divided among couples, these have focused almost exclusively on Western industrialized countries. We use the Family and Changing Gender Roles module of the 2012 International Social Survey Programme in which participating countries were still generally wealthier countries, but included scattered countries in Central/South America and Asia as well as South Africa. This allows us to provide a geographic perspective on the progress of both halves of the gender revolution in which all regions of the world are at least minimally represented.

Background

When assessing how well William Goode's predictions in *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (Goode 1963) had fared over the course of half a century, Andrew Cherlin indicated that poorer countries might experience a late-comer effect in which their family patterns came to resemble those in earlier developing countries without passing through some of the intermediate stages. The classic "late-comer" story with respect to industrialization was Japan, a country that rapidly transitioned from a predominantly agricultural economy to an advanced industrial economy using cultural and institutional knowledge developed in the West instead of experiencing the lags

associated with the development of such knowledge. If late-comers to family change experience an accelerated process, then the two halves of the gender revolution could possibly proceed more simultaneously in later-developing countries.

While such a hypothesis might prove overly optimistic, it would certainly be welcome given that increases in women's paid labor force participation tend to increase stress on families, while men's greater involvement in the home and family has the potential to relieve it. Goldscheider et al. (2014) describe how industrialization created separate spheres for men and women, but the gender revolution "is in the process of undermining that structure, first by inserting married mothers into the public sphere of the economy as co-breadwinners, and eventually by enfolding men into the private sphere of the family, as co-nurturers." Before the economy and the family became separate there was still a division of labor by gender with women doing tasks closer to home (Bjorklund and Shackelford 1999), but distinct productive and reproductive spheres emerged with wage-based employment.

Increasing men's involvement in work within the household—the second half of the gender revolution—faces interactional barriers (Kan, Sullivan and Gershuny 2011). What this means is that cultural scripts for how gender is "done" tend to persist even when women enter the paid labor force in large numbers. Core housework (including cooking and laundry) tend to remain female-dominated even when men take up household work that repeats less frequently like major cleaning, repairs, and tax returns (Coltrane 2000). Men also seem more willing to take on additional child care than additional housework (Bonke and Esping-Anderson 2011). But these generalizations are based on work on Western countries and little is known about the extent to which they hold elsewhere.

The second half of the gender revolution is also shaped by prevailing institutions (Kan, Sullivan and Gershuny 2011). Where part-time work lacks many of the benefits associated with full-time work rather than carrying benefits proportional to the hours worked, there is more incentive for couples to divide their available labor in a complementary rather than egalitarian fashion. Conversely, there are more options for negotiating the division of labor within the couple in nations that provide universal preschool than in those with older school start ages. Even with only these two examples, there is clearly room for cross-national variation in men's domestic work based on the way institutions shape options. Further, institutional change has the potential to alter cultural scripts regarding appropriate roles and responsibilities, but that is neither automatic nor instantaneous. For these reasons, we expect that in countries throughout the world there will be great diversity in how couples divide labor, but we nonetheless seek to document overall patterns among world regions.

Data

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) facilitates cross-national social science research by conducting comparable annual surveys in a wide variety of countries. The topics for each survey are developed over several years by a sub-committee before they are pre-tested in

various countries; the final questionnaire is adopted in an annual plenary meeting of participating countries ("History of the ISSP," n.d.). The ISSP is well-known for its care in developing questions that are meaningful in all of the countries and for producing equivalent translations of questions in a host of languages.

We use data from the 2012 survey on Family and Changing Gender Roles covering 37 countries. The countries are shown by region in Table 1 (with the four that needed to be excluded due to data limitations noted).

REGION	COUNTRIES
Northern Europe	Denmark, Finland, (Great Britain)*, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
Western Europe	Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland
Eastern Europe	(Bulgaria)*, Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Slovakia
Southern Europe	Croatia, Slovenia, Spain
North America	United States, (Canada)**
Oceania	Australia
Africa	South Africa
Asia	(China)***, India, Israel, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey
Central & South America	Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Venezuela

* Excluded because partner's paid work hours were not asked.
** Excluded due to a miscoding on the marital status variable in ISSP data making impossible to distinguish between singles and those whose partner had no work hours.
*** Excluded because house-work hours were top-coded at 3 per week (making it impossible to discern meaningfully differences between partners).

The starting sample size was 47,372 in the remaining 33 countries, but our analytic sample is far smaller because we consider division of labor within couples: 20,086 respondents not living with a partner are excluded. Among couples, we wanted to focus on those with significant market work and therefore dropped couples in which the sum of his work hours and her work hours was less than 30 hours per week.[1] There were 7275 out of 27,286 couples that did not work at least 30 hours between the two of them, but this number includes couples where both partners were

[1] This threshold was set so that even in countries with the shortest official work weeks, couples whose total work was at least one full-time equivalent would be included.

retired. Only in India did more than 20% reporting being in the labor force also report zero or minimal hours a week. It seems that in India respondents may have reported hours of formal employment rather than total paid employment, and therefore the analytic sample is probably biased toward those in formal jobs. This makes the sample more comparable to other countries, but it also makes the sample less representative of the whole population in India.[2]

In order to focus on how couples were dividing labor when they had a choice, we dropped couples where either partner was disabled or retired regardless of the other partner's work hours (2231), and couples where either partner was in compulsory service (48). We further reluctantly dropped those who did not give numeric responses for work hours (1862) or housework/care work hours (1376). We dropped 551 respondents in Turkey who were not living in private households, as well as 158 that did not answer whether or not children were living in the household (mostly in Austria, France, and Japan), and 9 that did not report their gender.[3] This left 13,776 couples in 33 countries, the range being from 234 observations in Argentina to 838 in Spain. In other words, despite initial sample sizes mostly in the 1000-2000 range, focusing only on respondents in partnerships reduces those numbers significantly, and focusing on couples who have significant paid work hours to allocate between them and who have complete data reduces them still further. We therefore present regional rather than individual country analyses. The individual country figures are in the appendix.

Methods

Our analysis of how couples divide market and domestic work uses the number of hours per week the respondent reports that they spend 1) doing paid work, 2) doing household work, and 3) caring for other household members. Respondents also reported the number of hours their partner spent in the same domains. Although it can be expected that partner's housework and care work hours would be generally under-reported relative to own hours (Kornrich, Brines, and Leupp 2013), this would not bias overall results because men and women were equally represented in each country's sample.

We summarize couples' paid work hours using 4 categories: traditional (she does not work, he does), neo-traditional (she works, but he works at least 7 hours a week more than she does), egalitarian (the gap between their paid work hours is less than 7), and reverse traditional (she works at least 7 hours a week more than he does). The 7-hour threshold is somewhat arbitrary, but we chose it for both empirical and theoretical reasons. Empirically, the existing literature tends to divide paid work into similar categories, but with both working full-time as the category closest to our "egalitarian" category and a residual category of all couples where the man does not work full-time (regardless of what his partner does). We constructed categories to describe

[2] The other countries where relatively large proportions of couples (10-20%) are excluded because their work hours do not sum to at least 30 per week are Chile, South Africa, South Korea, and Venezuela, but these countries are more comparable to the rest of the sample than to India where over 40% are excluded.

[3] The respondent's gender is known, but the respondent's partner's gender is not known. The assumption that all partners are opposite-sex partners is clearly in error and might lead to slight overestimation of the extent to which division of labor departs from men specializing in market work while women specialize in domestic work.

how labor was being divided within couples rather than to focus on full-time work per se, but to keep our work as close to the existing literature as possible, we selected a cut-off that created a neo-traditional category of a comparable size to existing studies (we tested 5, 7, and 10 hour thresholds). Theoretically, 7 is a nice threshold because for paid work it means that during the work week a partner who works fewer hours works more than one fewer a day, and for domestic work that has a 7-day week, it means at least one fewer a day.

We summarize couples' domestic work hours using similar categories: traditional (he does none, she does some), neo-traditional (he does some, but she does at least 7 hours a week more than he does, egalitarian (the gap between their domestic work hours is less than 7), and reverse traditional (he does at least 7 hours more per week than she does). While we do not measure the hours contributed by extended family members or paid household help (which may be more important in some contexts than others), we do measure whether the hours that the couple contributes are differentiated by gender. We present descriptive statistics for housework and care work separately as well as for the two summed (domestic work).

We also investigate regional differences in the effect of having a preschool-aged child in the household on the division of labor. Small children draw women out of the paid labor force more than men (Cowan and Cowan 2000), but is this equally true throughout the world? Here we simply use a dummy variable indicating the presence of a preschool-aged child in the household (exact ages varied by country depending on official school start age), and estimate its effect on reported hours of paid work using ordinary least squares regression. We estimated the effects separately for women's paid work and men's paid work.

We used a similar approach to estimating the effect of children on the weekly hours of care work. Here we included variables for the number of preschool-aged children as well as the number of school-aged children (both top-coded at 4), again testing effects separately for men and women.

Finally, we characterize the division of labor within couples considering the intersection of public and private spheres. If couples share both market and domestic work roughly equally, we call that egalitarian. If the man does more paid work and the woman does more domestic work, we call that traditional or neo-traditional (depending on whether she works at all). If the woman does more paid work and the man does more domestic work, we call that reverse traditional. In all other categories, one partner is carrying a heavier load than the other (has equal or greater work in at least one sphere not offset by less work in the other). We refer to this as the "second shift" while recognizing that it departs from the classic (Hochschild and Machung 1989) use of the term in two ways. First, we do not restrict the term to those working full-time outside the house and then bearing a greater burden at home: we also use it to describe those bearing equal weight at home and still having a greater burden outside the house. Second, we also describe "his second shift" in cases where the gendered division of labor favors the woman.

		domestic work		
		he does more	about equal	she does more
paid work	he does more	his second shift	his second shift	traditional/neo-traditional
	about equal	his second shift	egalitarian	her second shift
	she does more	reverse traditional	her second shift	her second shift

We provide descriptive statistics across regions for these combined paid and domestic work categories. We also predict which of the six categories couples fall into using multinomial logistic regression. The reference category is traditional/neo-traditional, meaning that the odds ratios for the other categories reflect the probability of being in each category relative to having a traditional or neo-traditional division of labor. The advantage of using this regression approach is that we can also compare how much the influence of factors determining the division of labor (the independent variables) vary between regions. Thus while we are somewhat interested in what predicts how couples divide labor, we are more interested in *variation* in what predicts division of labor across regions.

The control variables for our multinomial logistic regression are:

> **duration of the relationship**: new (<2 years), 2-6 years (reference category), 7-12 years, and long-term (more than 12 years; see Light and Omori 2013 and also Lam, McHale and Crouter 2012).
>
> **age**: we use the woman's age in continuous years and also include a dummy variable for whether her partner is more than five years older than she is. Older respondents may favor a more traditional division of labor, and relationships where the man is considerably older may be more traditional as well.
>
> **education**: we include the woman's and the man's education. The ISSP standardizes completed categories of education across countries. We use this ordinal variable that progresses from no formal education to primary school and then lower secondary, upper secondary, post secondary, lower level tertiary, and finally upper level tertiary as a continuous variable for both her completed education level and his completed education level.
>
> **religiosity**: we also include the respondent's frequency of service attendance as a continuous variable. The ordinal categories are never, less frequently than once a year, once a year, several times a year, 2 or 3 times a month, once a week, more often.

type of place of residence: because very little of the sample in some regions lives in rural areas, we measure type of place of residence by how urban it is. That is, our urban variable has the lowest value for those living on farms or homes in the country and then increases in value as residence type moves to country villages, towns or small cities, suburbs, and big cities.

legal status: This is a dummy variable signifying that the partnership is cohabiting rather than marital. Although division of labor has been shown to be more egalitarian within cohabiting couples in some contexts (Davis, Greenstein, and Marks. 2007; Domínguez-Folgueras 2013), cohabitation in Central/South America may be less likely to be characterized by an egalitarian division of labor because until recently cohabitation was concentrated among lower classes (Esteve, Lesthaeghe and López-Gay 2012).

student status. Being a student is a temporary status that might have a great impact on the division of labor. We include dummy variables for whether each partner is a student. Theoretically, it would be nice to control for unemployment (actively seeking work) status as well, but couples cannot have an egalitarian division of labor if one is unemployed given that we analyze only couples with at least 30 hours of paid work between them.

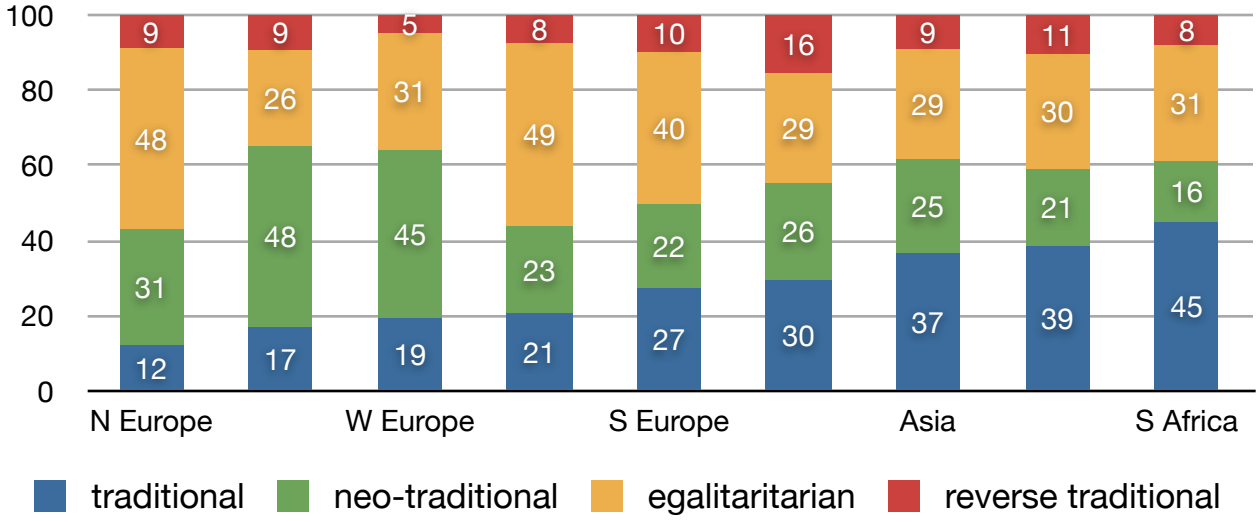
Not all of the control variables are available for every country. Fortunately, there is considerable overlap in the missing items so that the only countries that must be omitted from the regression analysis are those where the survey did not collect partner's education: Australia, Chile, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Norway, Philippines, Russia, and South Africa.

Results

Division of Paid Work

The division of paid work within couples differs substantially across regions. In Figure 1 the regions are sorted according the prevalence of traditional division of paid work. This arrangement where the woman does not participate in the paid labor force but that man does (for at least 30 hours a week) is the least common in Northern Europe (12% of couples), and it is also relatively uncommon in the rest of Europe as well, though Southern Europe with 27% of couples dividing paid work traditionally comes closer to the United States' 30% than to Western (19%) and Eastern (21%) Europe. Africa (45%), Central and South America (39%) and Asia (37%) are the regions with the highest levels of traditional division of paid work. Traditional division of paid work is also relatively uncommon in Australia (17%), but unlike in most of Europe, that is not because of a high proportion of couples where the woman works the same or more hours than the man—instead it is because in 48% of Australian couples the woman is doing paid work but the man works more (the arrangement we call neo-traditional). Western Europe is very similar to Australia with 45% of couples being neo-traditional. In most of the other regions, 21-26% of couples have a neo-traditional division of paid work with South Africa standing out at on the low end (16%) and Northern Europe (31%) falling between Western Europe and the rest.

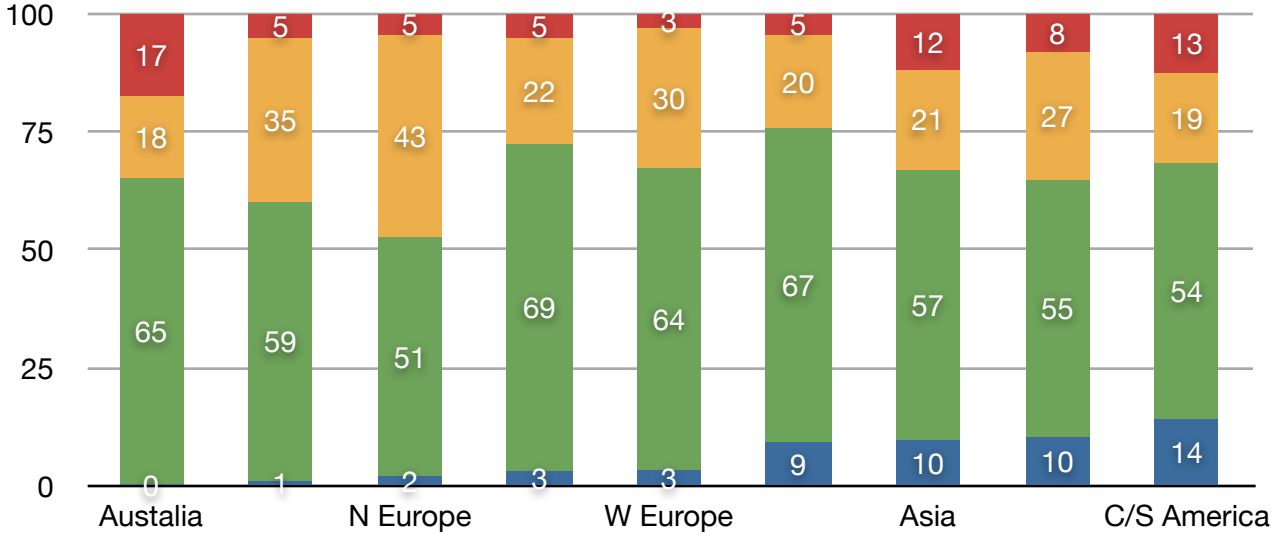
Figure 1: Division of Paid Work



Over half of couples have either a traditional or a neo-traditional division of paid labor in Australia, Western Europe, the United States, Asia, Central/South America, and South Africa. The regions where more than half of couples have either an egalitarian or a reverse traditional arrangement are Northern, Eastern, and Southern Europe. This is driven by the prevalence of egalitarian arrangements which charicterize 40-49% of couples in these regions. Couples where the woman works at least 7 hours a week more than the man (reverse traditional) are relatively uncommon: they comprise more than 10% of all couples only in the United States (16%) and Central/South America (11%).

traditional neo-traditional egalitaritarian reverse traditional

Figure 2: Division of Domestic Work (Housework plus Care Work)



Division of Domestic Work

Comparing Figures 1 and 2 reveals that the second half of the gender revolution has clearly not progressed as far as the first half. Despite the regional differences highlighted above, in every region the woman worked as much or more than the man in 35% or more of couples (Figure 1). In contrast, only 24% or more of couples include a man who does at least an equal share of the domestic work (housework plus care for others; Figure 2). More importantly, in every region besides Australia integration of men into domestic work is at lower levels than integration of women into paid work. Western Europe is again similar to Australia: the two halves of the gender revolution show similar progress there. The United States and Northern Europe stand out in Figure 2 as the regions where men's participation in domestic work is at the highest levels relative to women's, but it has still not caught up to women's participation in the paid labor force. Egalitarian division of domestic labor is most common in Northern Europe (43% of couples), followed by the United States, Western Europe, and South Africa (35, 30, and 27%, respectively). The remaining regions have shares between 17% and 22%. In every region of the world, over half of couples divide domestic work in what we call a neo-traditional fashion: both partners participate, but women do at least 7 hours a week more than men.

The regions where partnered women are the least likely to participate in the paid labor force at all are also mostly the regions where men are the least likely to participate in domestic work at all. In Central and South America, men are the least likely to support their female partner, given that 14% of couples belong to the traditional category. This means that women do all of the couple's domestic work. Furthermore, in South Africa, Asia and Southern Europe the share of traditional couples is 9-10%. Southern Europe stands out in this regard because although partnered women's paid labor force participation was low by European standards, it was high compared to the regions in the Global South. However, with respect to the division of domestic work, Southern Europe shares a traditionalism with regions in the Global South. In the other parts of Europe as well as in the United States and Australia, less than 4% of couples include a man who does not participate in domestic work.

We do note, however, that the Southern regions have more households where the man does more domestic work than the woman (8-13% in the reverse traditional category). Australia also has 17% of men doing the lion's share of the domestic work. The remaining regions show percentages between 3% and 5% in the reverse traditional category.

Children and Paid Work

Across the entire sample, we find that having a child under school age in the household reduces women's paid labor force participation by an average of 5.6 hours a week (Figure 3). There is marked variation by region around this average. In Eastern Europe and Australia, having a preschool child decreases women's paid work hours significantly more, reducing them 15.4 and 10.2 hours, respectively. In Southern Europe there is no significant difference in work hours between women with and without preschool children; this makes the region significantly

different from the total sample with its 5.6 hour gap between women with and without preschool children. In Central and South America, women with preschool children work an average of 2.5 hours a week *more* than women without preschool children.

The effect of preschool children on men's work hours (Figure 4) is smaller and generally positive: adding 1.1 hours to men's work weeks in the whole sample. None of the regions are significantly different from this average, though the estimated effects of a preschool child range from reducing men's paid work by 0.5 hours to increasing it by 1.9 hours. Two side note emerging from these analyses 1) men work more than women on average in every region, and 2) preschool children have a significantly different impact on work hours for men and women except in the three regions where they did not significantly reduce women's work hours (South Africa, Southern Europe, and Central/South America).

Figure 3: The Effect of Having a Preschool Child on Women's Paid Work Hours

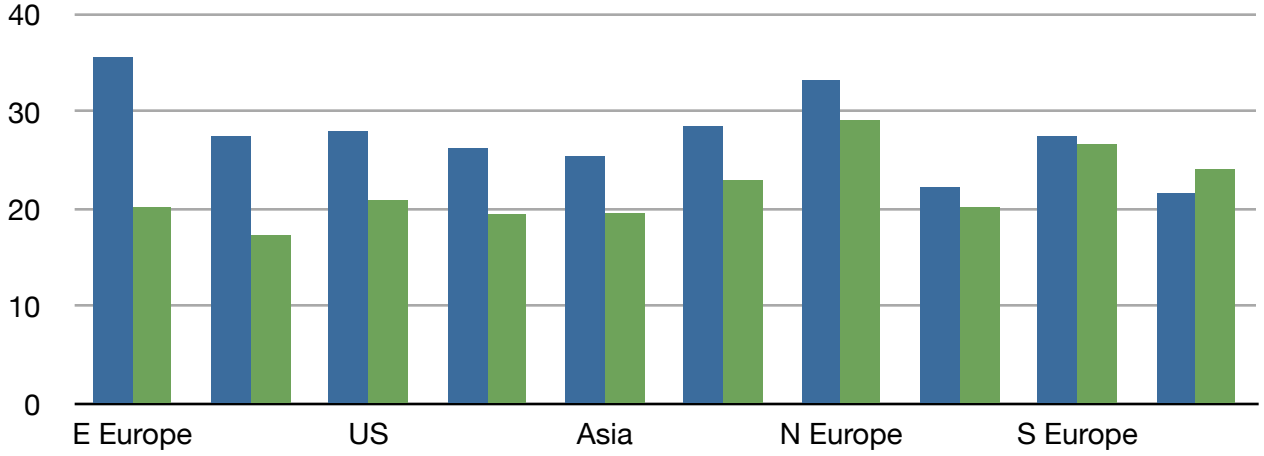
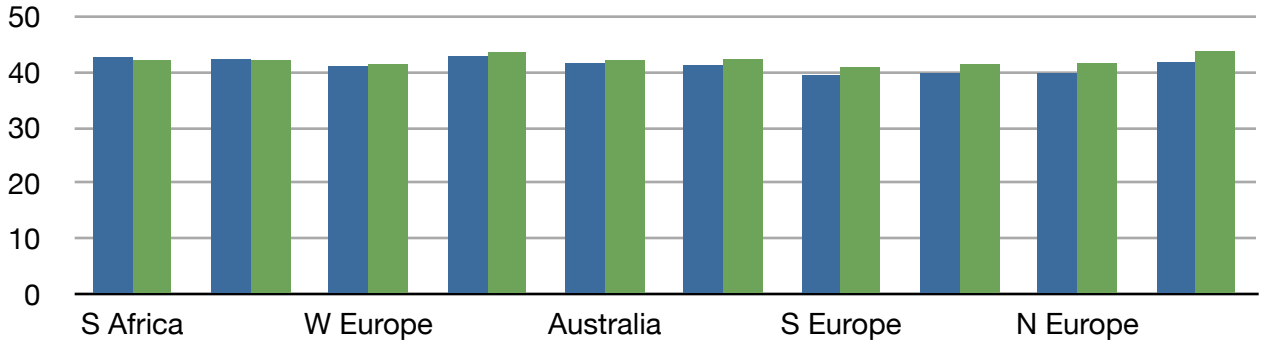


Figure 4: The Effect of Having a Preschool Child on Men's Paid Work Hours



Children and Domestic Work

Although there are important regional and gender differences in the effect of having children on the amount of care work, we start by emphasizing the commonalities: children increase the number of hours spent caring for others in every region, and they do so for both men and women. The sole exception to this generalization is that an additional school-aged child does not significantly increase men's care work hours in Australia. An additional preschool-aged child significantly increases care work hours everywhere.

The regions in Figure 5 are sorted in the order of the additional hours added to women's caregiving time for an additional preschool child. These increments are much smaller in Central/ South America, Africa, and Asia than in the more industrialized regions. The 1.0-7.2 hours of additional care work in these regions is significantly less than the average across all countries (9.1 hours). Only Australia where an additional preschooler is associated with 11.8 more hours of care work does not differ significantly from the average. The 12.7-15.6 additional hours of care work across Europe and the US are all significantly more than the average. School-aged children also add significantly to women's hours of caregiving in every region, but the number of hours is smaller than for preschool children and the regional disparities are also smaller. The range of hours added is from 1.4 in Asia (the only region with significantly fewer hours than the average of 3.5) to 6.6 in Southern Europe (one of three regions with significantly more hours than the average).

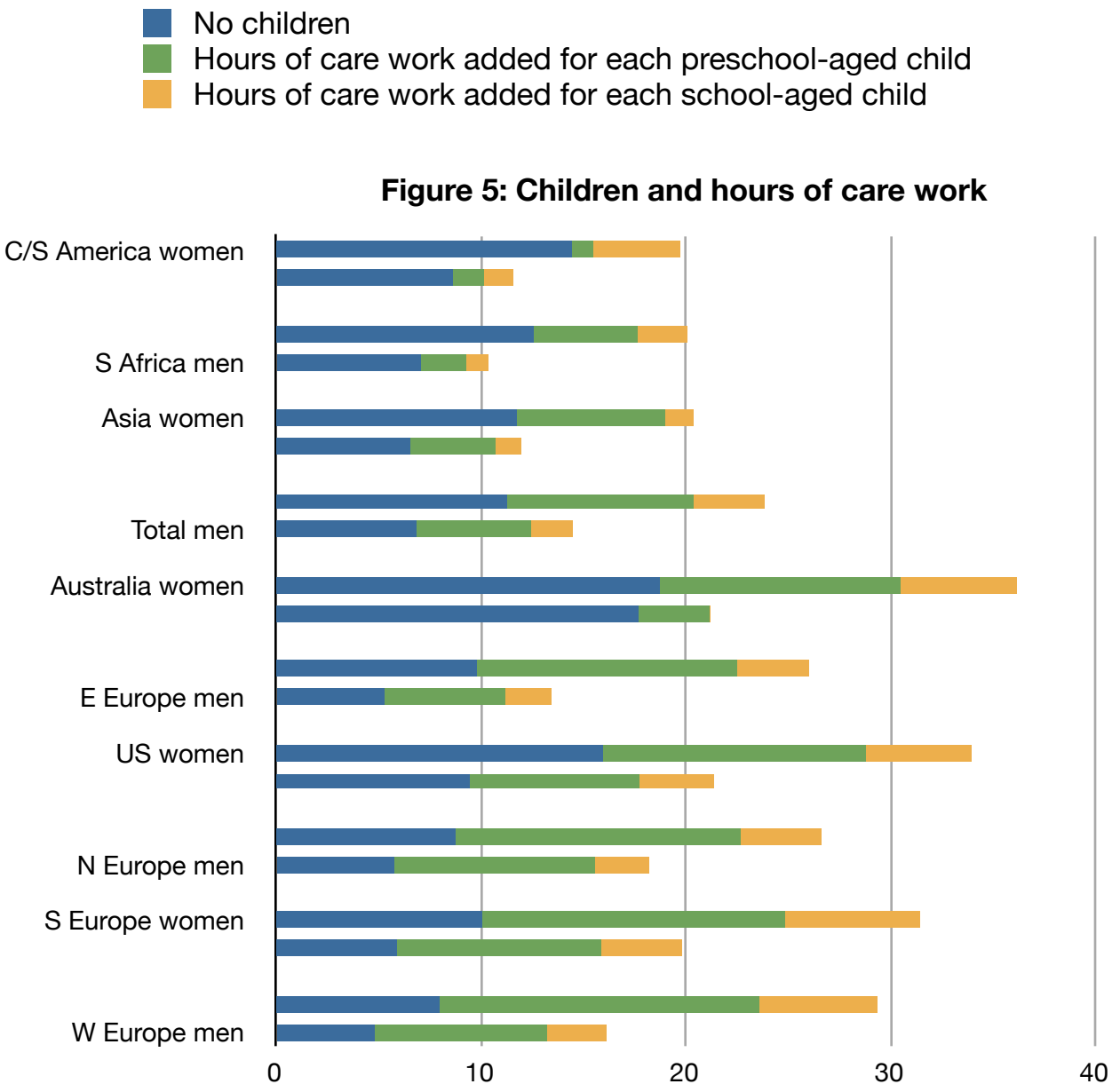


Figure 5: Children and hours of care work

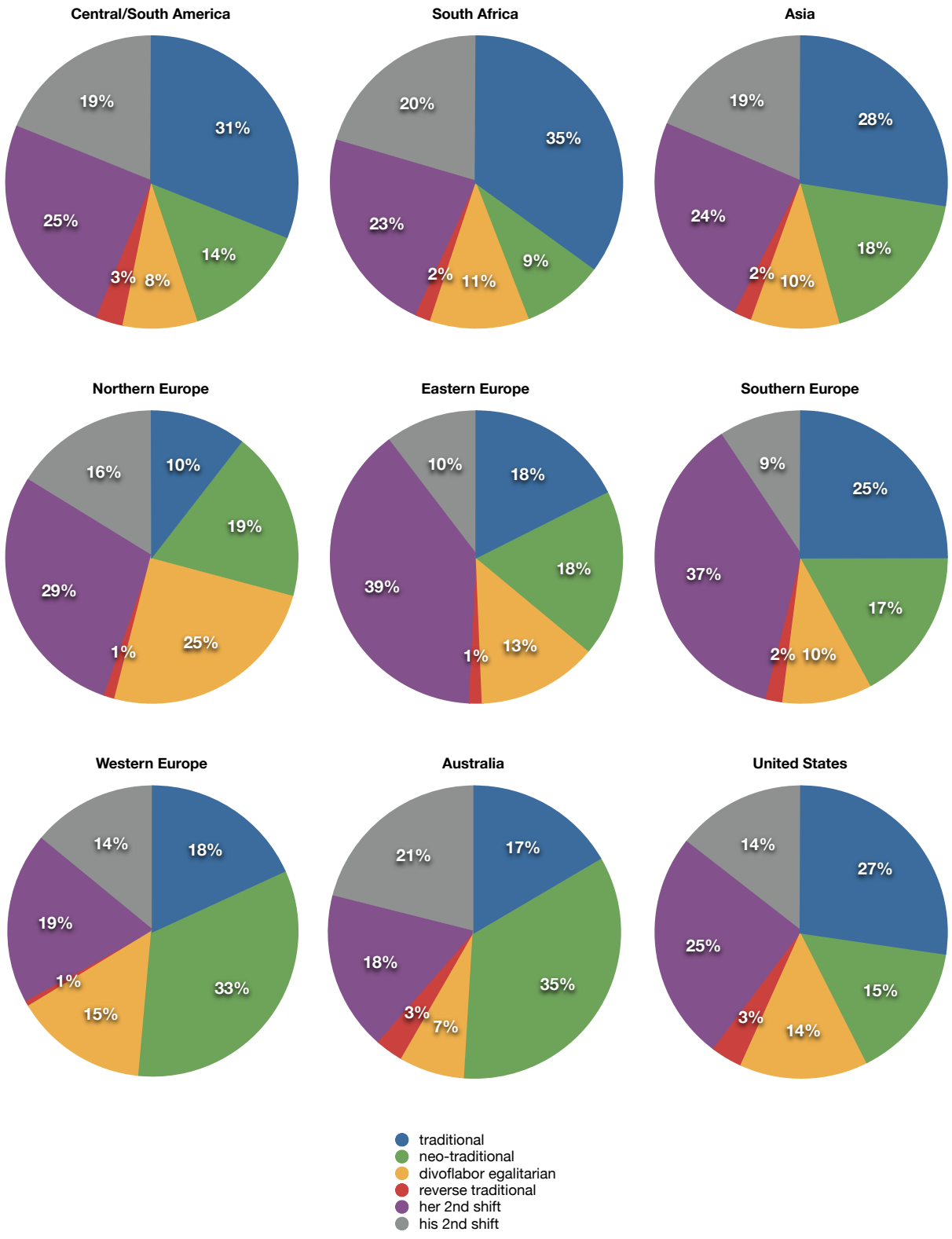
Caregiving is still a domain dominated by women: when there are no children present, women spend more hours caring for other family members than men do everywhere besides Australia. Children also generally increase the gap between men's and women's caregiving hours, but there are important exceptions. First, in South Africa and Central/South America where preschoolers increased women's caregiving hours the least, having a preschooler in the household did not increase the gender gap in care work hours. Second, in the United States where men with a preschooler spend 8.3 more hours per week caring for others, the gender gap also did not grow significantly with the addition of a preschool child. Again, the effects of school-aged are muted relative to preschool children: school-aged children increased women's caregiving hours

significantly more than men's except in South Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the United States.

We also checked for effects of children on men's and women's housework hours. Here the gender differences were relatively small: an additional child added just under an hour a week to women's housework hours and about half an hour a week to men's housework hours. Men do not add additional housework with an additional child to compensate for women's increased care work burden.

The unexpected finding was in the regions where children added more to housework hours, it was school-aged children that added more to their parents' burden than preschool children. Some of this may simply reflect difference in reporting of multitasking hours: someone cleaning the bathroom while caring for a preschooler may think of that time as primarily child care while a parent cleaning the bathroom while their child does their homework may think of that time primarily as housework. Nonetheless, school-aged children add 0.4-2.6 to women's housework time in Northern, Western, and Southern Europe plus the United States, Australia, and Asia. They add 0.7-1.4 hours to men's housework time in Southern Europe, the United States, and Asia.

Division of All Work


Central/South America
31%
14%
8%
3%
25%
19%
South Africa
35%
9%
11%
2%
23%
20%
Asia
28%
18%
10%
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traditional
neo-traditional
divoflabor egalitarian
reverse traditional
her 2nd shift
his 2nd shift

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