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DOES THE PANDEMIC AFFECT INEQUALITY WITHIN FAMILIES?

The Case of Dual-Earner Couples in Israel

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This article exploits the unique consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak to examine whether time constraints drive the unequal division of unpaid labor between dual-earner couples in Israel. Using the first wave of longitudinal household data that was collected in Israel since the outbreak of the pandemic, we focused on 325 dual-earner couples who stayed employed during the first lockdown. By employing OLS regressions, we examined the association between changes in employment hours and changes in unpaid labor for partnered men and women. Strong evidence was found for a gendered translation of the time constraints mechanism: A decrease in hours of paid work is related to an increase in hours of care for children among men and women, but time devoted to housework increased only among women. We conclude that time constraints that resulted from the dramatic effect of the first lockdown on paid and unpaid work in Israel did not significantly change the gender division of unpaid housework but did change the distribution of childcare. The theoretical implications of this conclusion for future research are discussed.

Keywords: *gender inequality; COVID-19; gender division of labor; time constraints; dual-earner couples; unpaid work; Israel*

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Soon after the outbreak of the pandemic, social scientists around the world established that the economic crisis following the pandemic has grave consequences for the most vulnerable population in our societies, women in particular (Alon et al. 2020; Kristal and Yaish 2020; Yaish, Mandel, and Kristal 2021; Yavorsky, Qian, and Sargent 2021). Some have projected from this new body of research that gender inequality in society will increase in coming years (Alon et al. 2020). Yet relatively little is known about whether gender inequalities in the division of unpaid work have compounded among different types of families (e.g., dual-earner couples, single parents). We aim to bridge this gap by providing one of the first studies on the effect of the first national lockdown in Israel on the gender division in unpaid work *within* and *between* families of dual-earner couples.

The unique circumstances posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have provided us with the opportunity to revisit the mechanisms behind the unequal division in unpaid work. The economic shutdowns and national lockdowns following the outbreak of COVID-19 have significant implications for the number of hours men and women spend in paid and unpaid work. Many lost their jobs, were forced to take unpaid leave, or reduced their working hours while demand for housework and care hours increased dramatically, particularly in households with children. The question arising from this is: What can we learn from these changes in working hours (both paid and unpaid) about the underlying mechanisms behind the unequal gender division of unpaid work?

To address this question, we utilize a unique data set of dual-earner couples sharing the same households, who reported on their paid and unpaid work before and during the first lockdown in Israel in March 2020. These unique data enable us to use couple-level data to study how changes in the work schedule of couples who both remained working throughout the first lockdown altered the gender division of unpaid labor in Israel.¹ We argue that dual-earner couples with young children experienced the most severe conflict in balancing paid and unpaid work as both spouses stayed employed, while the demand for care and housework soared. A typology of households based on distinct patterns of change in employment levels of dual-earner couples enables us to examine the reciprocal effects of spouses' employment on changes in unpaid work and the gender division of it.

Israel makes for a compelling setting for different reasons. First, Israeli families are relatively large because Israeli women have relatively high fertility rates (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

[OECD] 2021). With an average of three children per family, demand for unpaid work in the Israeli family is high even without the imposition of lockdowns. Despite this, Israeli women's engagement in paid employment is relatively high (Mandel and Birgier 2016), suggesting that most Israeli families struggle to balance paid and unpaid work even in normal times. Second, the COVID-19 crisis further increased families' social and economic strains, particularly during the first strict lockdown. Israel enforced a complete shutdown of all childcare facilities (for approximately two months), restricting mobility to only about 100 yards from home, and movement between households was forbidden—even within the same extended family. That is, families with children were not able to outsource any help with domestic chores and childcare, including from close relatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the gender division of labor has a long history, with several dominant approaches. In the early 1980s, the “specialization” model, rooted in neoclassical economic theory, suggested that in a couple-headed household one of the spouses should specialize in paid work in the labor market and the other in unpaid work at home. Because the household as a unit seeks to maximize its utility, men will usually specialize in paid labor and women in unpaid labor (Becker 1981). As married women with children became normative in the labor market, the dual-earner couple model became prevalent, and the debate about the gender division of labor between paid and unpaid work intensified. In particular, scholars have begun to inquire whether the increase of women's share in paid employment might lead men to increase their participation in unpaid employment.

Although gender gaps in unpaid labor have declined since 1965 (Bianchi et al. 2000), the consensual finding across OECD (2017) countries is that partnered women do more unpaid work than partnered men, even as they do similar hours of paid work. By implication, women's share of housework and care is substantially higher than men's, even though increasingly more women engage in paid work (Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel 2020). In Israel, for example, women in dual-earner families spend almost twice as much time as men on housework *alone* (Mandel and Birgier 2016). Israel is not a unique example in this regard: Similar patterns were found in the United States as well as in other industrialized

countries (Claffey and Mickelson 2009; Gough and Killewald 2011; Greenstein 2009; Hook 2006). It is argued, in fact, that persistent gaps between women and men in unpaid labor are one of the reasons for the stalled gender revolution (England 2010).

Why Is the Division of Unpaid Labor Unequal?

Scholars have proposed three perspectives that serve as different mechanisms influencing the gender division in unpaid work: (1) the time availability; (2) the gender perspective; and (3) the relative resources (Bianchi et al. 2000; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). Previous studies on the gender division in unpaid work were preoccupied with the role of these mechanisms in generating unequal gender division in unpaid work. Whereas Bianchi et al. (2000) argue that time availability and relative resources are the main mechanisms responsible for the unequal division of unpaid work, others argue that even when women out-earn their spouses, the division of housework is more traditional; housework and care are thus gendered tasks that are expected of wives, and this notion is instilled into girls as part of their traditional gender socialization (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994).

Time Constraints. The time availability (time constraints) perspective focuses on the amount of time spent by men and women in paid employment, especially following marriage and childbearing, as an indication of the amount of time left for all other unpaid activities. Because men work on average longer hours than women, it follows according to the time constraints mechanism that women have more time than men to spend on housework and care (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coverman 1985; Hiller 1984; Sayer 2005). This perspective has gained some empirical support in previous research (Cunningham 2007; Gough and Killewald 2011).

According to this perspective, a change in paid work hours is associated with a change in the amount of time devoted to the rising demand for housework and care. Just as important, these changes should not be gendered. However, there is a disagreement in the literature about the causal direction between paid and unpaid work. For example, the “human capital” theory suggests that investment in unpaid work will affect paid work. Accordingly, more time spent on housework and childcare depletes the available effort for employment and lowers productivity, as reflected in lower wages (Becker 1985). Studies that looked at this effect found a significant wage penalty for housework, which is amplified among women (Bryan and Sevilla-Sanz 2011; Cooke and Hook 2018; Hersch

2009; Hersch and Stratton 2002). Carlson and Lynch (2017), however, found that among women paid and unpaid work affect each other reciprocally, but for men the direction goes from unpaid work to paid work.

The Gender Perspective. At the core of this perspective is the view that gender is a social structure that effects individuals as well as other social institutions (Risman 2004). Because housework and care are traditionally considered to be feminine tasks, within couples who hold traditional gender ideology, women are more likely to take on domestic responsibilities (Berk 1985; Ferree 1990). Housework is thus seen as a vehicle through which men and women express their gender. Men express their masculinity by breadwinning, and women express their femininity by unpaid labor (Connell 2005; England 2010).

The “doing gender” perspective (West and Zimmerman 1987) further suggests that regardless of time constraints and relative resources, domestic unpaid work gives both men and women an opportunity to display their gendered expectations. Just as important as the consequences of time constraints are gendered expectations: When women work in the labor market, they continue to “do gender” at home (Bittman et al. 2003; Mandel, Lazarus, and Shaby 2020; Schneider 2012). Previous research reveals that housework is perceived as more feminine than caring for children. As a result, gendered expectations are more pronounced for housework than for care (Sullivan 2013).

Relative Resources (Bargaining Power). Davis and Greenstein (2013) underscore the notion of power for explaining the relationship between gender and housework. We use the relative resources perspective to assess relative power of spouses—based on the relative education and income of spouses—to explain who will take more responsibility at home. By implication, the spouse who earns more (usually men) should have more power to negotiate less time in unpaid work (Brines 1994).² Empirical work suggests some evidence for this relative resources approach (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994). However, in the present study, we were unable to test this mechanism and so focus the analyses primarily on whether the time constraint mechanism or gender ideology are more predictive of change in the gendered division of labor. More to the point, we examine whether and how changes in paid employment coupled with an increase in demand for domestic unpaid work affects the gendered division in unpaid work.³

Recent scholarship on the impact of the crisis on unpaid work reports mixed results. What is common to all these studies is a lack of information

on *both* spouses within the family. Thus, for example, Carlson, Petts, and Pepin (2022) have found that men become more involved in unpaid work due to the crisis, whereas others have shown an increase in women's burden of unpaid work due to the crisis (Casale and Posel 2021; Dunatchik et al. 2021; Meraviglia and Dudka 2021; Seiz 2021; Shockley et al. 2021; Zamarro and Prados 2021). Others found that men have increased their engagement in care but not in housework (Craig and Churchill 2021). Studies on the association between employment status and unpaid work of men and women show that changes in employment (e.g., unemployment, fewer working hours, or working from home) trigger men to increase their care hours, whereas women have increased their care hours regardless of their employment status (Del Boca et al. 2020; Hank and Steinbach 2021; Sevilla and Smith 2020). Similarly, Kulic et al. (2021) find a negative association between income change due to the crisis and changes in unpaid work hours for both men and women. By contrast, only a few studies have found that changes in demand for unpaid work due to the closure of childcare facilities and schools during the lockdowns trigger changes in employment for mothers (Petts, Carlson, and Pepin 2021). The unique circumstances that the pandemic elicited, alongside the data set we use, present an opportunity to test hypotheses derived from the theoretical discussion presented above about potential sources of change in gender inequality in the division of unpaid work within the family.

HYPOTHESES

We assume that in the context of the pandemic in Israel, changes in paid work will lead to changes in unpaid work. We make this assumption on two grounds. First, the overwhelming majority of job losses in Israel were initiated by the employers. Only 2 percent of men employees and 11 percent of women employees have requested unpaid leave to take care of their children (Mann 2020).⁴ Second, at the start of the pandemic, the fear of a looming economic crisis made it very unlikely that men and women would voluntarily reduce working hours and forgo earnings. The first set of hypotheses are based on the time constraints explanations described above:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): A decrease in paid work hours will result in an increase in the number of housework hours, equally for partnered men and women.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): A decrease in paid work hours will result in an increase in the number of childcare hours, equally for partnered men and women.

Whereas the above hypotheses are derived from a gender-neutral time constraint mechanism, previous scholarship has shown that the time constraint mechanism is gendered, leading men and women to invest differently in unpaid work (Bianchi et al. 2000; Gough and Killewald 2011; Hook 2006; Shelton 1992). That is, based on the gender perspective, the second set of hypothesis reads:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): A decrease in paid work hours will result in an increase in the number of housework hours, more for women than for men.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): A decrease in paid work hours will result in an increase in the number of childcare hours, more for women than for men.

The different scenarios postulated above have implications not only for respondents and their spouses' unpaid hours but also for gender inequality in the division of unpaid work. We thus further examine the extent to which changes in the division of paid work due to the crisis have consequences for the gender division of unpaid labor within families.

THE LOCAL SETTING

Husbands and wives in Israel are strongly attached to the labor markets, regardless of the presence of young children, and wives have increased their participation and hours invested in paid employment in recent decades. Many Israeli families are full-time dual-earner families (about 39 percent of all couple-headed households in 2008) (Herzberg-Druker and Stier 2019; Stier and Herzberg 2013) even as most also have children. Marriage rates in Israel are relatively high, divorce rates are low, and Israeli women's fertility rate is higher than in any OECD country (3.01 in 2019 [Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2020]). Despite this, unpaid labor at home is still gendered, and a large share of housework and care is considered women's responsibility (Kaplan and Karkabi Sabah 2017; Mandel and Birgier 2016).

The COVID-19 virus started spreading in Israel with the arrival of the first confirmed COVID-19 case from Italy on February 23, 2020. Since then, the number of confirmed cases has soared, and (as of this writing) more than 8,000 have died as a result of COVID-19 (World Health Organization 2021). Israel was among the first countries to lock down its economy and to put people in tight quarantine—three times since March 2020. Childcare centers, schools and universities were completely closed on March 13, 2020, sending nearly three million children ages 0–18 years

to remote learning (approximately 30 percent of Israel's population), and the economy was shut down nearly completely. Although Israel started to ease restrictions on April 19, childcare centers and schools reopened only two months after being shut down. To avoid high unemployment rates because of this shutdown, Israel's government encouraged employees to furlough their employees to paid leave rather than terminating their employment. Since then, Israel has experienced two additional, less strict, lockdowns (September–October 2020 and January 2021) that included partial economic shutdowns. Focusing on the first lockdown in Israel can shed light on the immediate effects of the crisis for the gender division of labor and more generally for gender inequality. To study the long-term effect of the crisis, analyses of the longitudinal data of subsequent waves will follow—only after the crisis is over.

The first lockdown in Israel, as in many other countries, was the longest, and included the strictest restrictions on the economy, households, and movements. All schools were closed in the first lockdown, including the special education system, and visiting each other's homes was forbidden—even within the extended family. By implication, replacing unpaid care and housework with paid services was forbidden and largely unavailable. Indeed, research in Israel indicates that in the first lockdown fewer families outsourced their domestic chores and care than in the second lockdown (Mann 2020). Therefore, Israel serves as an interesting case study for the effect of the crisis on paid and unpaid work not only because of its exceptional family characteristics (i.e., big families; dual earners), but also because it did not provide any solution for working parents of young children during the first lockdown.

METHODOLOGY

Data

Data for this study are based on the first wave of a unique longitudinal survey of 2027 adult Israeli men and women (age 18+ years) who were employed or self-employed in the first week of March 2020, before the lockdown of the economy. As can be seen in the Online Appendix (Figure A1), the longitudinal data were collected in five waves, indicated in orange. The data are not publicly available. The survey was managed by Panel4all, an online research company that holds an Internet panel of tens of thousands Israeli panelists, representing the adult population of Israel. The survey is not a probability sample of the population because only

those registered with the panel may be sampled; it is a random sample of the panelists, stratified by age, gender, geographical region, and religiosity. Individuals are recruited to the panel by other panel members (snowball) and by advertisements in social media platforms. Panelists gain points for each survey questionnaire they fill out. Our sample is a random probability sample, drawn from the total number of panel members. Thus, the survey provides an accurate depiction of Israeli society in April 2020, when the first wave was fielded. Subsequent waves of the survey represent this initial population, as in other longitudinal studies. Our survey provides good estimates of labor force participation rates, as the Figure A1 in the Online Appendix clearly shows (compare the solid blue and red lines with the dashed blue and red lines).

The first wave of the survey, on which the current analysis rests, was collected between April 23 and May 4, 2020, and includes information, among other things, on paid and unpaid work of respondents and their spouses in the first week of March (before the economic downturn and the first national lockdown) and in the last week of April (after the economy was shut down, but before it was reopened). The current analysis focuses on dual-earner couples with children under 18 years who remained employed between March and April ($N = 325$ couples).⁵

Variables

Dependent Variables. To study whether changes in the amount of time available for unpaid work (time constraints) by partnered men and women in a household due to the economic lockdown has bearing on the gender division of unpaid work, net of gender ideology and power-bargaining positions, we constructed several variables at the individual and household levels. The dependent variables in our analysis tap the division of unpaid work within households (changes in housework hours, changes in care hours, share of women in housework, share of women in care hours). These variables were constructed based on information about the number of hours spent on care and housework, given by the respondents and their spouses, before the first lockdown in March and toward the end of the lockdown in April.⁶ This information was obtained in the first wave in April, in response to the following questions: (1) How many hours did you spend on housework last week/in the first week of March? (2) How many hours did you spend taking care of your children last week/in the first week of March? (3) How many hours did your spouse spend on housework in the last week/in the first week of March? And (4) how many

hours did your spouse spend taking care of your children last week/in the first week of March? With this information, we calculated two sets of dependent variables as follows: The first set calculated at the individual level is the change in weekly hours that dual-earner couples spent on housework and on care between March and April (four variables: change in men care hours, change in women care hours, change in men housework hours, and change in women housework hours).⁷ To check the sensitivity of our results to the definition of this variable, we referred to change in work hours of less than 10 percent as if there was no change. Results were largely similar and did not alter our conclusions in any way (see Table A3 in the Online Appendix). The second set calculated at the household level is the share of the partnered women in care and housework, calculated separately for April (two variables: share of women in housework in April and share of women in care in April). We calculated these as the ratios of the number of hours spent by women on care *and* housework divided by the number of hours spent on care *and* housework by both spouses. This ratio runs between 0 and 1, where 1 indicates that the partnered women are doing all the unpaid work in the household.

Independent Variables. The main independent variable taps the time constraints mechanism (changes in paid work). To measure it, we calculate the difference in paid working hours between March and April. This information was obtained in the first wave in April in response to the following questions: (1) How many hours did you work last week/in the first week of March? (2) How many hours did your spouse work last week/in the first week of March? However, instead of adopting these differences as a continuum scale, we define a change in working hours as a move between part-time employment (less than 35 weekly hours) and full-time employment, and vice versa. This is in line with Stier and Lewin-Epstein's (2000) argument that only full-time employment represents a significant transformation in women's roles, and hence only such a significant move into/out of full-time employment is consequential for women's gendered expectations. That said, we have also examined changes in working hours as a continuous variable, with similar results (see the Online Appendix Supplementary Analysis S3, Table A7). We measured changes in employment scope in our data for both respondents and their spouses at the household level. Thus, we identified five patterns of change: (1) no change in employment hours for either spouse (46.5 percent of couples); (2) employment increased from part time to full time at least for one partner (14.2 percent); (3) employment decreased from full time to part time for women, and men had no change (21.8 percent); (4) employment

decreased from full time to part time for men and women had no change in employment (11.4 percent); and (5) employment decreased to part time for both (6.2 percent).

Relative resources (bargaining power) were measured by the relative income of spouses at the household level, in response to the following question: Who had a higher wage, you or your spouse? We collapsed the answers to this question into three categories: (1) couples in which the husbands out-earn their wives; (2) couples in which both spouses earn the same; and (3) couples in which the wives out-earn their husbands. Noteworthy is our result from an ancillary analysis that shows very little changes in the relative income of spouses, which is our measure of bargaining power between March and April 2020.

Gender ideology was probed by six questions that were designed to tap attitudes toward work and family conflict (scale ranges from 1 = agree, to 5 = do not agree). We adopted these questions from the ISSP (International Social Survey Program) “Family and Changing Gender Role IV” questionnaire from 2012 (ISSP Research Group 2016) and present them in Table A1 in the Online Appendix. For each individual, we calculated the average of these six variables to measure gender ideology, whereby the higher values indicate more liberal work-family ideologies and vice versa. Notably, only respondents (and not their spouses) were asked these six questions, and this scale was introduced only in the second wave of the survey, in June 2020 when the first lockdown had ended. We do not use the second wave of the data collection (June 2020) in our main analyses, but we use it to obtain gender ideology data on our respondents. As arises from the Online Appendix Supplementary Analysis presented in S1 and Figure A3, gender ideology barely changed in Israel among 2002, 2012, and 2020, so it is reasonable to use data that were collected in the second wave and to append them to the first-wave data. With nearly a 30 percent attrition rate between waves, we had about that much missing information on gender ideology. To circumvent a loss of couples due to missing information on these questions, we replaced missing values on gender ideology with the average gender ideology calculated from the data of wave 2 and identified in our models whether the data were imputed or measured. The dummy variable indicating imputed gender ideology, relative to measured gender ideology, was not statistically significant in any of our models.⁸ Gender ideology in Israel leans toward the liberal end (3.58 on a scale of 1–5) and is not expected to change over a short period of time. Indeed, the Online Appendix Supplementary Analysis (S1 and Figure A3) shows that the gender ideology measure that we use is statistically similar to those estimated in 2002 and in 2012 on the basis of the

ISSP data. This reassured us that we could use the gender ideology measure, derived from the information in the second wave.⁹

Additional control variables in the analysis include number of working hours for both spouses in March 2020, age, and highest level of education attained (dummy for academic degree) of both spouses separately; the religious identity (secular, traditional, religious, and ultra-orthodox); nationality (Jewish or Arab) of the couples; and whether the household includes children below 6 years. We control also for the gender division of unpaid labor in March 2020 to account for the gender division of unpaid labor that existed before the crisis. In additional sensitivity analysis, we have employed models that included the number of children, the sex of the respondent, and whether the household includes children below 12 years.¹⁰ In Table 1, we present the descriptive statistics of our sample.

Analytic Approach

To tease out the effect of time constraints on unpaid work hours, we regress the difference in care and housework hours between March and April of 2020 on the five patterns of change in employment scope between March and April 2020, net of gender ideology, bargaining power, and sociodemographic controls. We employ OLS (ordinary least squares) models to this end, fitted separately for men and women, within households, and estimating their coefficients with robust standard errors.

To examine the consequences of time constraints for gender inequality in the division of unpaid work within couples, we regress women's share in care and housework in April on changes in employment patterns of the couples, with controls for gender ideology, bargaining power, and other sociodemographic characteristics. We also control in these models for women's share in housework/childcare in March 2020. These models show the effect of time constraints (changes in employment scope) on changes in women's share in housework/childcare due to the crisis. Thus, positive signs in the effect of change in time constraints in these models imply increasing gender inequality, and vice versa.

Because gender ideology, bargaining power, and sociodemographic characteristics are time invariant variables in our data, their effect on the unpaid hours of spouses and the gender division in paid work can be manifested only in March 2020. Therefore, control variables were introduced in the analysis to adjust for gender inequality in the division of unpaid work in March 2020. Thus, these variables and their underlying mechanisms cannot affect changes in unpaid work hours that may have been caused by the pandemic and its aftermath of economic shutdown and

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Individual- and Household- (Couple-) Level Variables in the Analysis

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Individual-level variables		
Dependent variables		
Δ in weekly unpaid work hours		
Care	4.79 (15.45)	5.03 (21.09)
Housework	0.42 (13.29)	1.78 (19.90)
Unpaid weekly work hours		
March		
Care	15.93 (20.89)	28.18 (30.06)
Housework	12.28 (17.96)	16.49 (18.27)
April		
Care	20.72 (26.74)	33.22 (35.31)
Housework	12.70 (16.01)	18.27 (17.96)
Independent variables		
Paid work hours		
March	43.42 (21.64)	36.26 (18.35)
April	38.09 (21.65)	27.71 (19.4)
Age	40.99 (8.44)	38.99 (8.25)
Percent with college degree	0.58	0.66
	<i>All</i>	<i>N</i>
Household level variables		
Dependent variables		
Women's share in housework, April	0.59 (0.19)	
Women's share in care, April	0.62 (0.19)	
Independent variables		
Women's share in housework, March	0.59 (0.19)	

(continued)

TABLE 1. (continued)

	<i>All</i>	<i>N</i>
Women's share in care, March	0.63 (0.17)	
Δ in couple's employment patterns		
No change	0.46	151
Increased	0.14	46
Women's decreased, men's did not change	0.22	71
Men's decreased, women's did not change	0.11	37
Both decreased	0.06	20
Relative earnings		
March		
Men out-earn women	0.62	203
Equal earnings	0.14	46
Women out-earn men	0.24	75
April		
Men out-earn women	0.63	201
Equal earnings	0.14	47
Women out-earn men	0.23	77
Gender ideology	2.33 (0.68)	
Percent Arabs	0.06	21
Religiosity		
% Secular	0.46	150
% Traditional (observing some)	0.32	103
% Religious	0.14	45
% Ultra-orthodox	0.08	27
Has children under the age of 6	0.71	230

Note: Care, housework, paid weekly hours, relative earnings, Δ in couple's employment patterns, and share of women in housework/care were measured in March 2020 (before the lockdown) and April 2020 (during the lockdown).

national lockdown. That is, our OLS regression models can tease out the effects that time constraints might have or not have on the gender division of labor within families in Israel.

FINDINGS

About half of dual-earner couples who stayed employed during the first economic shutdown changed their employment patterns (see Table 1);

TABLE 2: Mean (and SD) Weekly Changes of Care and Housework Hours from March to April, by Gender (*N* = 325)

	<i>Partnered men</i>	<i>Partnered women</i>	<i>Couple</i>
Δ care weekly hours	4.79 (15.45)	5.03 (21.9)	9.82 (27.9)
Δ housework weekly hours	0.42 (13.29)	1.78 (19.9)	2.20 (23.6)

Note: Δ care and housework weekly hours were measured in March 2020 (before the lockdown) and April 2020 (during the lockdown). Changes of care and housework hours between men and women are not statistically significant.

most workers reduced their weekly working hours (39 percent reduced hours but 14 percent increased). A closer look at the couples who reduced paid work hours reveals that twice as many women than men reduced their weekly working hours (22 percent and 11 percent, respectively).¹¹

According to the time constraints mechanism, these changes in employment hours should affect the amount of time devoted within the household by the partnered men and women to meet the growing demand for housework and care. To what extent, then, do families invest more time in housework and care due to the COVID-19 crisis? Table 2 shows that the number of weekly hours that couples invested in housework had increased by about two hours due to the COVID-19 crisis, with an additional 10 hours per week on childcare. Striking in Table 2 are the gender differences, particularly in housework, in which women increased their workload four times that of men.¹²

These results establish that both paid and unpaid weekly work hours changed between March and April 2020 in Israel, most likely due to the COVID-19 crisis. In fact, these results suggest a negative association between the two: Working hours tend to decrease, and care and housework hours tend to increase. But does the reduction in paid hours relate to the increase in unpaid hours? And does the effect differ by gender?

To answer this question, we begin by presenting the association between changes in paid and unpaid work among dual-earner couples. Figure 1 displays the net effects of employment change, relative to those for whom paid work remained unchanged, on housework and care, for men and women separately (full models are presented in Table A2 in the Online Appendix). In each panel of this figure, we present the four coefficients of employment pattern drawn from separate models shown in Table A2 in the Online Appendix. The upper left panel refers to the change

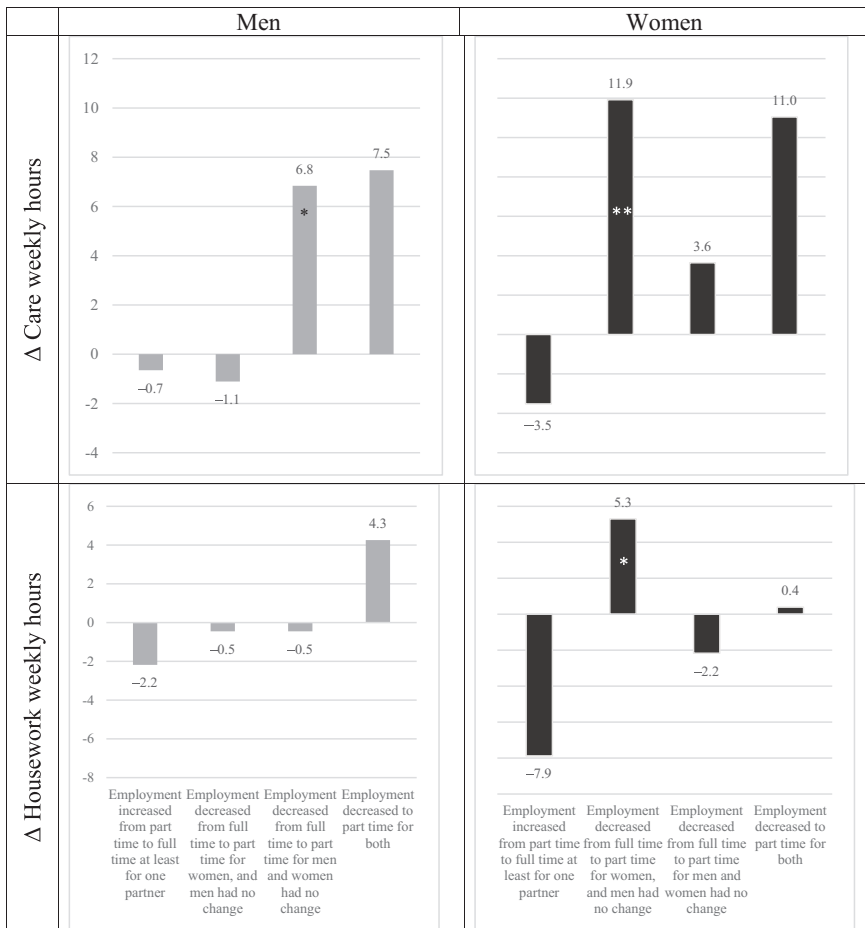


FIGURE 1: Changes in Unpaid Work (Weekly Hours) by Different Changes in Employment Patterns of Dual-Earner Couples, Adjusted Regression-Based Coefficients, March and April 2020

Note: The coefficients for changes in employment patterns are drawn from four different ordinary least squares regressions. Models also control for working hours in March, share of women in housework and care in March, gender ideology, relative earning power of couples, whether the family has young children (under the age of 6 years), number of children, gender of respondent and both spouses' characteristics (age, education, nationality, religious identity). We present the full models in the Online Appendix (Table A2).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

in care hours for men, which increased by 6.8 weekly hours after moving from full-time to part-time employment, whereas their spouses' employment remained unchanged.

The results in Figure 1 suggest that men did not change their housework hours in light of changes in paid working hours (lower left panel), but women increased their housework hours in light of such changes by 5.3 hours (lower right panel). We find that both men and women increased their care hours by 11.8 and 7.8, respectively, when their working hours decreased. Moreover, the difference between men and women in the number of hours that were added to care is not significant statistically: Both men and women increase their care hours equally in response to the decrease in working hours.

An additional interesting finding is how changes in spouses' working hours affect each other's unpaid work. Men's reduction in paid hours did not statistically significantly affect the amount of time women devote to care or housework. There are no significant differences between men and women in their change in housework hours when men reduce their employment. Women's reduction in working hours does not change men's housework or care hours. The differences between men and women in both care and housework are significant. That is, when women reduce their working hours, there are significant differences in the time men and women invest in unpaid work. Moreover, when we control for relative earning of spouses in our models (see Table A2 in the Online Appendix), and given previous findings regarding relative resources (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994), it is interesting that among couples in which women out-earn men (compared with couples in which men out-earn women), men (or women) do not seem to increase their unpaid work hours.

Our findings imply that time constraints contribute to the unequal division of unpaid work, particularly for care. Next, then, we examine whether in the aftermath of the pandemic the gender division of unpaid work has become less unequal in Israel. Results from these OLS models are presented in Table 3 (full models are presented in Table A4 in the Online Appendix).

The larger the share of women's unpaid work before the pandemic in March, the more unequal their share becomes in April, after the outbreak of the pandemic. That is, the economic shutdown and the first national lockdown exaggerated preexisting gender inequalities within dual-earner couples in the division of both care and housework responsibilities. These results, moreover, run contrary to what was suggested by Carlson, Petts, and Pepin (2022). Changes in employment patterns take a toll on women. Specifically, couples in which only women have moved from full-time to part-time employment due to the crisis have consequently increased women's share of housework by about 5.2 percent and their share of care by about 8.4 percent. The implication of these results is that the women

TABLE 3: Ordinary Least Squares Regressions of Share of Women in Unpaid Work (Housework and Care) in April

	<i>Women's share in housework in April</i>	<i>Women's share in care in April</i>
Employment changes		
Omitted category (no change in employment hours for either spouse)		
Employment increased from part time to full time at least for one partner	0.001 (0.032)	0.018 (0.024)
Employment decreased from full time to part time for women, and men had no change	0.049 [†] (0.025)	0.081** (0.023)
Employment decreased from full time to part time for men and women had no change	-0.007 (0.029)	-0.039 (0.026)
Employment decreased to part time for both	-0.046 (0.037)	-0.029 (0.035)
Women's share in housework/care in March	0.510** (0.066)	0.632** (0.051)
Constant	0.252* (0.098)	0.211* (0.091)
Observations (<i>n</i>)	325	325
<i>R</i> ²	.394	.504

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Models control for working hours in March, gender ideology, relative earning power of couples, whether the family has young children (under the age of 6), number of children, gender of respondent and both spouses' characteristics (age, education, nationality, religious identity). We present the full models in the Online Appendix (Table A4).

[†] $p < .1$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

whose hours of paid work lessened faced negative consequences in their households since the outbreak of the pandemic. These results suggest a gender-biased time constraints mechanism on the overall division of unpaid work.

DISCUSSION

The main results of this article can be summarized as follows: With changes in working hours, both men and women have increased their childcare hours, but only women have increased their housework hours.

However, changes in working hours of men did not contribute to the overall gender division of unpaid work (housework and care).

First, taken together, our results provide some evidence for the time constraints perspective. That is, both spouses, not just women, increased the number of childcare hours when their employment was reduced, as was anticipated in H1b. When we examine housework, however, our results suggest that the consequences of time constraints for the division in unpaid work are gendered. That is, the reduction in working hours is translated into more housework only for women, as was anticipated in H1b and H2a. However, these findings contradict H1a. In addition, our results confirm previous findings that indicate that men shy away from housework, even when time becomes available (Shelton 1992; Sullivan 2013). Again, time constraints in times of the COVID-19 and the following economic lockdown are gendered, as men translate their additional time to care but not to housework, as was anticipated in H2b.

CONCLUSIONS

What the future holds for gender inequality in the division of unpaid work between spouses is one of the most pressing questions raised by scholars, social activists, and policy makers as many countries adopted economic shutdowns and regional lockdowns to fight the spread of COVID-19 in their populations (Carlson, Petts, and Pepin 2022; Del Boca et al. 2020; Hank and Steinbach 2021; Kulic et al. 2021). In this article, we use the unique circumstances posed by the pandemic to advance our understanding about the role of the time constraints mechanism to determine how couples balance paid and unpaid work. Addressing this issue is important because of its wider implications for gender inequality in society and for considering the best practices for advancing women in paid employment.

We find that both men and women invested more time in caring for their children when they decreased their paid working hours. However, only women increased their housework hours in tandem with changes in paid work. These findings support the claim that care and housework are not perceived in the same way by men and women (Sullivan 2013). These findings also lend support to the gender perspective, particularly the “doing gender” mechanism, according to which men contribute to unpaid work in line with their gendered expectations, even when time constraints are removed.


Another way to interpret these results, however, is to say that couples make a gendered translation of the time constraints mechanism, as was already suggested previously (Bianchi et al. 2000; Gough and Killewald 2011; Hook 2006; Shelton 1992). Accordingly, men react to the reduction in paid work with increasing unpaid work, but only by increasing childcare, whereas women respond to the reduction in paid work by increasing both care and housework. These findings lend support to the time constraints perspective regarding childcare. This being the case, time constraints should also have consequences for the overall gender inequality in the division of labor between paid and unpaid work within the family. In this respect, however, we found that when women's working hours decreased, the gender inequality in the division between paid and unpaid work increased. This increase, however, is rather *small* relative to the high levels of inequality that existed before the outbreak of the pandemic in Israel. Put differently, time constraints contributed very little to the overall level of gender inequality in the division of labor within the family. However, one should not underestimate our finding that the time constraints perspective does serve as an explanatory mechanism regarding childcare.

Our findings show that gender inequality in unpaid work within and between families is resistant to change, at least in Israel. The fact that even a gigantic shock such as the COVID-19 pandemic to the supply and demand of working hours did not alter the overall gender inequality in the division of labor within dual-earner couples suggests that the unequal division of labor within families is rooted much more deeply in society, as the time constraints perspective postulates. In this context, feminist scholarship argues that to really understand gender inequality, scholars should analyze the overall power relations between couples in order to understand gender inequality in unpaid work, as was suggested previously (for review, see Davis and Greenstein 2013).

Finally, this study adds to a growing literature that shows the detrimental effect of this crisis for women in society (Collins et al. 2021; Kristal and Yaish 2020; Mooi-Reci and Risman 2021). In particular, women have experienced more job losses and changes in employment than men, and women have increased their unpaid work more than their spouses have. These findings are not surprising, but they highlight that gender relations remain the same even in times of changes in other characteristics of everyday life. It is tempting to conclude that the COVID-19 crisis set the stage for the return of traditional gender expectations in society, where men are the breadwinners and women the housewives. Luckily, it is too early to make this call.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

NOTES

1. To anticipate, we argue that the shock to the labor market triggered changes in the gender division in the soaring unpaid working hours. The other direction of causality is also plausible, though debatable, especially in the first lockdown. Nonetheless, we have examined this possibility, and found, as expected, results that did not change our conclusion concerning the time constraints mechanism. See the Online Appendix Supplementary Analysis S2.

2. Gupta's (2006, 2007) autonomy theory posits that personal rather than relative income matters more, because those with higher income can outsource domestic duties for pay. However, this issue cannot be addressed in this study because Israelis in the first lockdown were not allowed, or able, to outsource any work for pay or to their extended family.

3. Preliminary analysis revealed that both the bargaining power measure and the gender ideology measure did not change between March and April 2020. Obviously, then, these mechanisms cannot be associated—statistically—with changes in unpaid hours between March and April. Nevertheless, we control for gender ideology and bargain power in our model because previous research has indicated that these mechanisms are associated with the level (rather than the rate of change) of unpaid work, similar to other time invariant variables in our models. Auxiliary analyses on the stability of the gender ideology in Israel are presented in the Online Appendix Supplementary Analysis S1, while those on the stability of bargaining power in Israel are presented in Table 1.

4. In Israel, since the first economic shutdown in March 2020, employees in unpaid leave were granted unemployment benefits with very few restrictions.

5. Our sample includes only couples who continued to be employed during the first lockdown. It excludes couples in which one or both spouses were furloughed or left their job.

6. The fact that one spouse was interviewed and answered about his/her partner can be a potential source of bias because respondents are more likely to overestimate their unpaid work hours and underestimate that of their spouse.

However, because our sample is equally distributed between men and women as head of household, it should not affect our results. We have nonetheless also controlled for the sex of the respondent in our models.

7. The change variables were calculated as the change in hours between April and March separately for housework and care and for men and women. For example: Change in care hours for men = (Weekly hours spent on care in April by men – Weekly hours spent on care in March by men).

8. To examine the robustness of the predicted measure of gender ideology (mean-imputation), we have also used multiple imputations (MI) to replace missing data on gender ideology with similar results. We used the MI technique as a robustness check on our mean-imputation method since results were in the same patterns as our main findings.

9. Our analysis is based on the first wave of the data collection. The gender ideology measure was obtained from the second wave of the data collection before the second lockdown. The attrition rate between the waves in our sample of dual-earner couples is 22.9 percent (92 couples). The second wave of data collection includes 157 women and 152 men.

10. These analyses are available from the authors on request. The results of these analyses did not change the conclusions herein.

11. Moreover, we found that in about 6 percent (20 couples) of the dual-earner couples both spouses decreased their weekly working hours. We retain this category in the analysis to increase the overall sample size, but we do not discuss this category due to its very small size.

12. In the Online Appendix (Figure A2), we display the distributions of care and housework change. These distributions illustrate that the overwhelming majority of couples changed their weekly care and household hours, with about 50 percent of them having increased their care and housework hours between March and April 2020.

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