

## **Domestic outsourcing and gendered time allocation to housework tasks: substitution, buyout or addition?**

**Lyn Craig\* and Janeen Baxter**

\*Social Policy Research Centre,

University of New South Wales

[lcraig@unsw.edu.au](mailto:lcraig@unsw.edu.au)

As women have entered the workforce in greater numbers over recent decades, it has become harder for families to find time for domestic labour. It is thought that a way of coping with this is for households to buy in domestic services (Bittman, Meagher, & Matheson, 1998). It is also thought that buying domestic services leads to greater gender equity in housework, because it facilitates women's time allocation to paid and unpaid work becoming more like men's (Bergmann, 2005). However, the extent to which such services actually save time, for which partner in a couple, and in which domestic tasks, remains unclear.

Research on domestic outsourcing has more often focussed on the determinants of its use than on its outcomes. This research suggests that using paid domestic help is more likely when households earn more (higher resources), do more paid work (more time constraint), have more objective demands (larger houses and bigger families), have less traditional gender attitudes, are more trusting, more highly educated, and view outsourcing as an appropriate strategy to deal with domestic demands (Baxter, Hewitt, & Western, 2009; de Ruijter, Treas, & Cohen, 2005; Tijdens, van der Lippe, & de Ruijter, 2003). Studies also note that some forms of domestic outsourcing, particularly the use of cleaners, is rarer than commonly supposed, however, and others find it is more closely related to household income than to women's work force participation (Baxter et al., 2009; Tijdens et al., 2003).

This raises questions of whether it is a successful strategy to cope with the time demands upon women in dual earning households, and what effect it actually has on time allocation and the gender division of labour. The relatively few studies which directly investigate the intra-household time impacts of domestic outsourcing show mixed results. A recent UK study finds that the use of domestic services is not associated with reductions in either men or women's domestic labour time (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2012). Similarly in France, where the state subsidizes and supports the use of paid domestic services by households, the amount of time relief gained by the women who purchase paid domestic services is marginal (Windebank, 2007). In contrast, a 1995 study of Dutch households found domestic outsourcing did reduce women's (and not men's) cleaning time (van der Lippe, Tijdens, & de Ruijter, 2004).

In this paper we take this enquiry forward by examining the effect of using cleaning, laundry or gardening services, and the purchase of restaurant or takeaway meals, on the time allocation of couples in dual-earner Australian households. We assess the effects of domestic outsourcing directly on time spent in total domestic labour, and in male and female typed tasks by each partner in matched couples. We also add to previous research by assessing the effects of the other partners' time in the same activity, to see if there is an additive effect within households, net of the impact of domestic outsourcing. We identify the effect of each partner's characteristics, including individual earnings and time in paid work, on their own and on their partner's time in each housework activity. We are interested to know whether these factors outweigh the direct effect of purchasing domestic services, and if there are differences by task and gender.

## **Theoretical Background**

It seems a relatively straightforward assumption that domestic outsourcing will lead to a reduction in men's and women's time on domestic labour. We might expect this relationship to be particularly strong for women since, we know women spend longer amounts of time on domestic labour than men (Baxter, Hewitt, & Haynes, 2008; Craig, 2007). If paying for domestic help is simply a labour saving strategy for women, that is, a substitution for work typically done by women, we would expect to see a negative association between domestic outsourcing and women's time on domestic work. On the other hand, domestic outsourcing in one area may free women to spend more time in another area of household work. It may be that outsourcing cleaning, possibly a less enjoyable set of tasks, enables women to spend more time on cooking or gardening, tasks which may be more enjoyable. In this case, we might not observe an association between domestic outsourcing and women's overall domestic time, but may observe a negative association for some tasks and a positive association for other tasks.

We also know that doing housework is not just about getting chores done, but may also provide a means of "doing gender" (Berk, 1985; Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003; Greenstein, 2000). For women, paying someone to do housework may pose challenges for their gender identity as "good women" leading women to compensate for their gender deviance by continuing to spend time on domestic tasks, despite having paid help (Greenstein, 2000). Alternatively, it may be that women who have high standards of household cleanliness and domestic order may be more likely than their counterparts to both employ domestic help and spend time doing housework. That is, certain kinds of women, those with high domestic standards, may be more likely to spend money on domestic help.

It is less obvious that domestic outsourcing will be associated with men's time on housework, and there has been little work investigating this relationship. Since most men do very little domestic work, domestic outsourcing is likely to have little effect on their time on domestic work. Alternatively, households that are both able to afford paid help with housework and have a demand for such help, may be more likely to be those in which women earn a substantial proportion of the household income (Baxter et al., 2009; van der Lippe et al., 2004). It is in these households that men may be most likely to feel the need to engage in processes of gender neutralisation (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000)(Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000; Bittman, et al 2003), suggesting a negative association between employing paid help and men's time on housework. Here the argument is not that employing domestic help is a labour saving device for men, but rather that households that employ paid help may be those in which men are most likely to engage in processes of gender neutralization, and hence also those in which men do less domestic labour.

One way to unpack these associations in more detail is to examine different types of domestic outsourcing and their effects on time spent on specific tasks. Not only do men and women spend differing amounts of time on domestic work, but the way that tasks are divided is also gendered. Women typically do more indoor work such as cleaning and laundry, while men do more outdoor work (Coltrane, 2000). We would thus expect different types of domestic outsourcing to differentially impact men's and women's time on domestic labour. For example, if outsourcing is an effective labour saving strategy, we would expect paying for meals or employing a cleaner will have a bigger effect on women's domestic time than men's domestic time. Similarly, outsourcing gardening or home maintenance tasks is likely to have a stronger association on men's time on these tasks.

## **Data and method**

We use nationally representative data from the Australian Time Use Survey 2006 (AUSTUS). This survey gives information on what respondents do over two 24 hour time periods, to a detail level of five minutes. All adult members of the sampled households provided data and because we are interested in how couples manage the demands of work and family, we draw a sample of dual-earner couples (N=1828 diary days). We estimate a series of OLS regression models to explore effects of using each of the domestic outsourcing measures on the time allocation of each partner. We enter characteristics of each respondent and of their partner including income (in deciles), income squared, whether or not they are in a professional occupation (yes=1), usual hours worked, age, and partner's time in the same activity, and control for a range of household characteristics home ownership (yes=1, marital status (cohabiting=0) number of children in the household, whether household is Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD, yes=1) and diary day (weekday=1).

## **Results**

Preliminary analyses suggest that domestic outsourcing does impact total time in domestic labour, and that there are differences by gender in the effects. Dry-cleaning and laundry services and gardener and maintenance services are associated with reductions in men's domestic labour time, and cleaning services with reductions in women's domestic labour time (Table 1). However, when we look at the subcategories of domestic labour and the impact of outsourcing upon each, we see that only food preparation and men's outdoor work are significantly related to the outsourcing of the particular activity net of other factors (Table 2).

Looking at the other independent variables of interest, we see women's food preparation time decreases the more they earn, and partners' earnings predict more time in this activity for both genders. Partner's earnings are also positively associated with more laundry time for men. We also find a substantial positive association between own and partner's time in outdoor work for both men and women. It may be they have more demand through larger grounds, or both find gardening enjoyable; research suggests that gardening is more likely than other domestic tasks to be seen as a hobby or recreational activity (Osterbacka & Ylikanno, 2012). Partners' time in cleaning is also associated with more time in that activity, suggesting shared standards, although the effect on men's time is small.

Overall the results suggest that the addition of external labour to the household does not substitute for household time in a straightforward manner, and in some cases is an additional input rather than a time saving strategy. It is also possible small cell sizes and low participation affects our preliminary results, and further modelling will address these issues.

**Table 1: OLS regression results for men and women's time in total domestic work**

	Men: total domestic work		Women: total domestic work	
<b>Service</b>				
Dry-cleaning/laundry	-22.80*	-22.76**	-4.72	1.53
Cleaner/home help	-5.98	-7.84	-28.77*	-24.20*
Gardener/maintenance	-19.53*	-19.17*	-2.3	-5.03
Restaurant meals	-2.92*	-2.52 <sup>x</sup>	-4.80**	-2.12
Takeaway meals	-0.58	-0.9	-1.67	-0.21
<b>Own characteristics</b>				
Earnings		2.92		-15.86**
Earnings squared		-0.04		0.95*
Usual weekly hours worked		-10.78***		-8.65***
Professional occupation		-3.15		-2.53
Age		0.06		2.17**
<b>Partners' characteristics</b>				
Earnings		-0.72		13.81*
Earnings squared		0.21		-0.97*
Time in total domestic labour		0.16***		0.19***
Usual weekly hours worked		2.71		6.88***
Professional occupation		14.32*		-7.65
Age		0.07		-0.1
<b>Household characteristics</b>				
Number of children under 15		1.03		8.92**
Own/buying home		31.62***		12.77
CALD		-25.62*		-0.31
Cohabiting		4.15		1.1
Dairy day is weekday		-58.56***		-51.45***
Constant term	113.46***	103.12**	199.97***	101.82**
N	1828	1828	1828	1828
r <sup>2</sup> <sub>a</sub>	0.01	0.15	0.01	0.15

<sup>x</sup> p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Table 2: OLS regression results for men and women's time in food preparation, laundry, cleaning and outdoor work**

		Food preparation		Laundry		Cleaning		Outdoor work	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Service	Restaurant meals	-0.28	-1.98**						
	Takeaway meals	-0.97*	-1.05						
	Dry cleaning /laundry			0.11	-0.04				
	Cleaner/home help					-0.42	-11.20		
	Gardener/maintenance							-7.53*	-3.22
Own characteristics									
	Earnings	1.03	-5.10*	-1.24	-1.66	2.71	-4.27	1.93	-2.90 <sup>x</sup>
	Earnings squared	-0.05	0.26	0.14*	0.06	-0.24*	0.25	-0.20	0.20
	Usual weekly hours worked	-2.64***	-2.71**	-1.09***	-0.71	-0.01	-0.63	-2.36**	-0.82
	Professional occupation	2.74	2.99	2.21*	-2.61	5.05*	-6.02	0.40	-1.35
	Age	-0.02	0.78*	0.21*	0.47 <sup>x</sup>	-0.14	-0.13	0.23	0.33
Partners' characteristics									
	Earnings	4.40**	8.03**	2.31**	0.67	-2.06	3.15	-2.27	3.11 <sup>x</sup>
	Earnings squared	-0.29*	-0.65**	-0.19**	0.00	0.31**	-0.20	0.17	-0.18
	Time in activity regressed	0.00	0.00	-0.02 <sup>x</sup>	-0.13	0.05***	0.14**	0.37***	0.19***
	Usual weekly hours worked	0.64	1.87*	0.37	0.19	-0.01	0.82	-0.24	0.29
	Professional occupation	6.60**	-2.11	1.55	-1.97	0.76	0.37	-0.81	-2.59
	Age	0.08	-0.03	-0.14	0.18	0.13	0.22	-0.09	0.09
Household characteristics									
	Number of children < 15	2.00*	7.20***	0.85	3.74**	1.46	-2.03	0.71	-2.25*
	Own/buying home	4.30 <sup>x</sup>	2.30	0.24	4.20	0.12	-1.17	12.52***	1.12
	CALD	-3.35	33.94***	-4.10*	-5.46	3.06	-1.41	-1.79	-7.97*
	Cohabiting	2.30	2.90	-0.47	0.51	1.46	12.30	5.34	2.20
	Dairy day weekday	-5.39**	-9.17***	-3.79***	-15.24***	-8.16***	-12.88***	-22.48***	-5.94***
	Constant term	14.98	38.27*	2.89	14.96	2.01	51.06*	24.13	-4.67
	r2_a	0.03	0.09	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.09	0.11
	N	1828	1828	1828	1828	1828	1828	1828	1828

<sup>x</sup> p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

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