

Gender, Household Labour, and Psychological Distress

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Abstract

Although considerable progress has been made in documenting the nature and gendered allocation of unpaid family work in Canada over the last several decades, relatively few epidemiological studies have addressed the potential consequences of household labour for women's mental health. Even fewer have focused on the consequences for men. The limited research which has examined the relationship between household work and well-being has produced conflicting findings. Conflicting findings may be due, in part, to the almost sole focus of researchers on time spent in family work as the key determinant of mental health outcomes, ignoring other conditions and characteristics of family work. The objective of the present study was to examine more nuanced relationships between the perceived division of household labour and psychological distress, taking into consideration other aspects of family work, including the nature of the household task and the perceived fairness of the division of family work. Of particular interest in the study was whether the nature of these relationships differs for men and women. The study involved secondary data analysis of a recently conducted telephone survey of employed, partnered parents with children. Data analyses involved a multi-stage process consisting of univariate, bivariate, and multivariable analyses. To address the key objectives of the study, a series of multiple linear regression models were estimated with psychological distress as the outcome, adjusting for key confounders. The results indicated that the perceived division of family work was important for women's psychological well-being and the perceived fairness of the division of family work for men's. That is, for women,

perceiving spending more time than their partners in housework and child rearing was associated with greater psychological distress. For men, perceived unfairness to themselves in the division of housework and perceived unfairness to their partners in the division of child rearing were both associated with greater psychological distress. The results of this study, combined with previous research, suggest that the gendered nature of household work has implications for the psychological well-being of both women and men and that both paid and unpaid work needs to be considered when examining the social determinants of parents' psychological well-being.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A dominant focus of epidemiological research on women's well-being has been the potential health consequences of combining work and family roles. Early studies examining the relationship between women's health and multiple social roles focused on role occupancy. (1) Thus, while the number and combination of social roles held by women were taken into consideration, the specific characteristics of both paid and family work (i.e., housework and child rearing) went largely unmeasured. (2) The number of roles occupied turned out to be an inconsistent predictor of women's health (3) and led to the search for more multifaceted explanations to clarify the relationship between women's roles and health, such as the nature and specific characteristics of the role(s) occupied (4) and the particular economic and social conditions in which women enacted those roles. (5, 6)

The shift in research focus from the quantity to the quality of social roles occupied has been most evident in the domain of paid work. For example, a number of conceptual models have been developed which highlight the importance of the psychosocial work environment in the mental and physical health of employed adults, such as the Job Strain Model, (7) and more recently, the Effort-Reward Imbalance Model. (8) Although the early focus of this research was on men, understanding of the qualities and characteristics of paid work which impact women's health has increased greatly over the last two decades. (9-11)

In contrast to paid work, relatively little is known about the characteristics of family work which may influence well-being. (12) This lack of research attention is likely the result of numerous factors, ranging from the view of family work as “women’s work” and therefore unimportant, to the many conceptual and measurement difficulties in attempting to accurately characterize such a complex role (13). While it is true that considerable progress has been made in documenting the nature and gendered allocation of unpaid family work in Canada and elsewhere over the last several decades, (14) relatively few studies have addressed the potential consequences of household labour for women’s mental health and even fewer have focused on the consequences for men. (15, 16) These are important gaps in the research literature, given the thousands of hours that Canadians in general and women in particular will spend in housework and child rearing over a life time.

The limited research which has examined the relationship between household work and well-being has produced conflicting findings. That is, more time spent on housework by women and men, whether measured in absolute terms or relative to a partner, has not been associated with well-being in a consistent way. (15, 17, 18) Conflicting findings may be due, in part, to the wide variety of measures used to assess family work and varying participant characteristics in terms of marital, parental and employment status. In addition, researchers have focused almost entirely on time spent in family work as the key determinant of mental health outcomes, ignoring other conditions and

characteristics of family work which may both vary across households *and* be associated with mental health outcomes. (19, 20)

The purpose of the present study was to examine more nuanced relationships between the perceived division of household labour and psychological distress, taking into consideration other aspects of family work, such as the nature of the household task and the perceived fairness of the division of family work. Of particular interest was whether the nature of these relationships differed for men and women. Using data from a recently conducted telephone survey in Saskatoon, Canada, the study focused on the experiences of partnered parents of school age children in dual-earner households. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there an association between the perceived division of housework and psychological distress?
2. Is there an association between the perceived division of child rearing and psychological distress?
3. Is the perceived division of low schedule control housework tasks (i.e., traditional female task, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry) more strongly associated with psychological distress than the perceived division of high schedule control housework tasks (i.e., traditional male task, such as making repairs around the house, maintaining the cars and doing yard work)?
4. Is perceived fairness in the division of housework/ child rearing more strongly associated with psychological distress than the perceived division of housework/ child rearing?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Gender, Work and Family Roles in Canada

Work and family roles have undergone many changes during last 20 years. The increasing number of women in paid employment, particularly married women with young children, has been one of the most significant trends in the Canadian labour force over the last three decades. (21) In 2004, 73% of mothers with children less than 16 years of age were employed, compared with 39% in 1976. Among women with children under the age of three, only 28% were employed in 1976, rising to almost two thirds of women in 2004. The vast majority of employed women with children under age 16 hold full-time jobs – nearly three quarters in 2004. Thus, the employment of both parents outside the home has become the norm rather than the exception for two-parent households in Canada: in 2005, 69% of couple families with children under 16 at home were dual-earner, up from 36% in 1976 and 58% in 1992.

Though nowhere near the same extent as paid work, gender-related changes in family work have also occurred over time¹. The most recent data from Statistics Canada shows that 25-54 year-old men increased their participation in housework from 1 hour per day in 1986 to an average of 1.4 hours per day in 2005, while in the same time period, women decreased their daily hours spent in

¹ Family work has been defined in a number of ways in the health research literature, though in most studies, the definition must be inferred from how it is operationalized in that particular study. (13) As noted by Shelton and John, (22) the most common definition of housework is as “unpaid work done to maintain family members and or a home” (p.300). Researchers may include child rearing in their definitions, but often leave out more “invisible” types of work (e.g., emotional work) from their studies.

household work, from 2.8 hours to 2.4 hours. (14) During the same time period, Canadian parents, both mothers and fathers, increased the amount of time spent on child rearing. In 2005, fathers spent approximately 1 hour each day on child rearing-related activities (compared with 0.6 hours in 1986), and mothers, 2.0 hours (compared with 1.4 hours in 1986). The statistics also suggest that fathers have become more involved in the primary care of their children, such as driving them to activities and assisting with homework, though mothers still perform the majority of this type of work. Mothers are also more likely than fathers to be involved in the planning and coordination of family activities. (23)

Similar to the trends reported in the general population of Canadian 25-54 year-olds, fathers in dual-earner families have also increased their participation in housework (from 70% in 1992 to 74% in 2005), while the mother's rate has dropped (from 94% to 90%). (14) In 2005, wives in dual-earner families spent approximately 2.2 hours on housework each day, compared with 1.4 hours by husbands. It is important to note that these are averages, with the relative proportion of time spent in family work varying according to the age of the children, work hours, and the educational attainment and income of parents. The sharing of family work is most equal among couples when the wife earns at least \$100,000 annually or when only the wife in a couple has a university degree. As observed by Marshall, (14) "these findings partly support the relative resources theory of the division of housework, which suggests that partners with relatively high education and income have more power to get out of doing housework." (p. 14)

On average, however, although men's participation in household work has increased and women's decreased over the last 20 years, women (including employed women) continue to do significantly more hours of housework and child rearing than men.

2.2 Family Work and Mental Health

2.2.1 Theory

Theorizing as to why or how family work may be related to mental health is quite underdeveloped in the research literature, particularly if compared to the voluminous literature on paid work. As recently noted by Walters and colleagues (12) "research on work within the home is still in its infancy. We do not have conceptual frameworks which are as well developed as in the case of paid work, nor are the elements of domestic labour clearly identified" (p.679). Within the domain of family work, theoretical advances in the last 20 years have been in regard to explaining the gendered allocation of household work rather than on the potential health consequences of that allocation (13).

Nonetheless, there are several ways in which the performance of household work could be reasonably linked with mental health outcomes. (24) Housework has been described in the research literatures as a low-prestige activity which is physically demanding, routine, and isolating. Because housework is inherently unpleasant, the more time spent in such an activity will tend to lead to lower well-being. The second explanation linking housework with poorer mental health is the notion of role strain or overload. (25) Role overload is based on the premise that human energy is limited, and the more demands within a role, or the

more roles a person occupies, the more strain experienced and the greater the likelihood of negative effects on health and well-being. Thus, employed parents' high housework and child rearing demands may create role overload, particularly if combined with paid work, resulting in time pressure and subsequent psychological strain. The third explanation is linked more with the proportion of housework done relative to one's partner, rather than the absolute amount of housework done. (26) According to equity theory, couples evaluate both what they put into a relationship and what they get out of a relationship. (27) Marital partners achieve equity when each contributes and participates fairly, with neither party being unfairly overburdened or overworked. The division of family work is one area that can contribute to couples' perceptions of equity or inequity in a relationship, and thus well-being.

2.2.2 Research Findings

Likely partly a result of the limited theoretical work done in the area, navigating through the research literature on family work and mental health is a challenging endeavor. The samples used to estimate the relationship between time spent in household tasks and mental well-being have varied widely in terms of age, employment status, and family role occupancy (i.e., parental status and marital status). In addition, a wide variety of measures have been used to assess family work, making integration of the research literature quite a difficult task. For example, many epidemiological studies rely on household structural variables as proxy indicators for the burdens of family work, such as the number and ages of children or the presence of older adults in the home. (12, 28, 29) This approach to

measurement is typically taken when researchers are using large-scale, government health surveys as data sources, such as the Canadian Community Health Survey. Although such questions may provide some very basic information, they give little information on how much time and effort is actually spent in taking care of the household. Given the lack of specificity of these items, it is perhaps not surprising that these indicators have been inconsistently related to women's mental and physical health. For example, research has found the number of children to be negatively related, (30) positively related, (31) and unrelated to women's health (28).

Time use measures are an alternative operationalization of family workload level and more commonly used in sociological research. Although time diaries have been used to gather information about housework time, most family work studies with health as an outcome have used direct questions. The latter measure typically requires respondents to indicate how much time they usually spend per day or week on specific household activities, which can either be grouped into "subtypes" of household labour (e.g., housework vs. child rearing) or summed into one overall measure of hours worked. (26, 32) More recent research has considered the relative time contribution of husbands and wives to family work. (15) Various measures have been used to assess the household division of labour, including dividing each respondent's housework hours by the total number reported by both partners (17,18) or having respondents rate their responsibilities on an ordinal scale, from no responsibility to total responsibility. (30)

Research examining the relationship between household labour and health has produced conflicting findings. Studies have found greater absolute time spent in

housework to be associated with poorer mental health, (18, 32, 33) better mental health, but only up to a particular threshold of hours, (17) and unrelated to women's health. (2, 34) Similarly, research has reported more time spent in housework relative to one's partner to predict higher depression among women (16, 17) and to be unrelated to mental health. (15, 18, 35) The results for men are even less conclusive. Men are less often included as participants in research examining the division of family work and mental health, including two of the most recent studies on the topic. (15, 16) The little research that does exist has produced mixed findings. (35-37). However, in a recent longitudinal study of 25,000 full-time public sector employees in Finland, long domestic working hours (>25 hours per week) was associated with increased rates of medically certified sickness absences for both the women and the men. In general, it appears that men's mental health may not be as strongly associated with the division of family work as women's. However, more research is clearly needed on this issue.

The disparate findings of research examining associations between family work and health outcomes may be due, in part, to the tendency to view the conditions and characteristics of family work as constant across individuals and households, rather than varying, as in paid work. (38) As observed by Glass and Fujimoto, (18) "when actual or proportionate measures of work hours (paid or domestic) are used to predict depressive symptomatology without considering whether those hours are spent in drudgery or satisfying work, interpretive problems ensue"(p. 181). Although housework can be burdensome, it has some positive attributes. For example, some research suggests that, compared with paid work,

family work may involve greater independence, less time pressure, and a greater sense of control over one's responsibilities. (39) Also, some household tasks (e.g., child rearing) may be more enjoyable than others (e.g., washing dishes). In addition, women who perform a disproportionate share of the household work do not necessarily perceive the arrangement as unfair. (26) Thus, whether one *perceives* the household division of labour as fair or unfair may be more important to well-being than the actual division of labour. (17)

2.2.2.1 Type of Task

Understanding of the relationship between family work and mental health has been impeded by the tendency of researchers to focus only on the division of housework *or* on the division of child rearing rather than both. (15) Researchers who have simultaneously examined both housework and child rearing have tended to combine them together into one measure, so that the independent effects of each on mental health, if present, cannot be determined. (16,17, 36) The few studies which have considered child rearing and housework separately in the same study suggest that these two areas may have different consequences for mental health. For example, the findings of several studies suggest that husbands' lack of participation in child rearing, but not housework, is associated with higher level of distress among employed women; (35, 40) however, at least one study found that husbands' involvement in housework was a better predictor of women's well-being than their involvement in child rearing tasks. (41) However, Strazdins, Galligan, and Scannell (42) found no statistically significant association between either the division of housework or the division of child rearing and depressive

symptoms in a sample of young mothers and fathers. More research is clearly needed to shed some light on this issue.

Another way of disaggregating family work is based on the notion of schedule control, (19) or “the ability to schedule tasks to reflect one’s personal needs rather than having to perform the tasks on a schedule independent of one’s personal needs” (p. 2). Low schedule control tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, are those which must usually be done every day (making it seem as if they go on forever) and at certain times, leaving the worker very little discretion concerning when they will be done. In contrast, high schedule control tasks, such as making repairs around the house, maintaining the cars and doing yard work, are often performed at the worker’s discretion, have a definite beginning and end, and are usually performed without any time urgency. Plus for some of these tasks, like home repairs, there may be more of a sense of accomplishment, because they are not ongoing, like cooking. Within the family unit, women typically spend more hours on low schedule control tasks and men spend more time on high schedule control tasks. (14) In their study of dual-earner couples, Barnett and Shen (19) found that for both husbands and wives, the more time spent performing low control tasks, the greater the level of psychological distress. In contrast, again for both husbands and wives, the amount of time spent on high schedule control tasks was unrelated to mental health outcomes. Interestingly, Robinson and Spitze (24) found that greater participation in low schedule control tasks was associated with greater feelings of unhappiness among husbands, but it had no impact on wives. Other research suggests that in addition to schedule control, a general perception

of being in control within the household may also be important for well-being. Kibria and colleagues (38) found that when homemaking was characterized by a feeling of autonomy it had a positive effect on women's well-being. More recent research has found low perceived control in the domestic environment to be associated with an increased risk of depression and anxiety for both women and men (43) and coronary heart disease among women. (44)

2.2.2.2 *Perceived Fairness*

Research suggests that the more hours wives spend in housework and child rearing the more likely they are to perceive the division of household labour as unfair. (34) However, performing a disproportionate amount of the family work relative to one's partner does not necessarily result in perceptions of unfairness. As observed by numerous authors, the conditions under which *inequalities* in the division of household work come to be perceived as *inequities* are complex and determined by a multitude of factors, including power and access to resources within a relationship. (13, 15, 45) However, whatever the determinants, whether an individual perceives the division of household labor as fair or unfair may be more important for mental well-being than objective measures of the division of household tasks, particularly for women. A number of studies have reported a positive association between perceived unfairness in the division of family work and depressive symptoms for women, but not for men. (18, 24, 26, 34) Although the majority of studies only considered housework, Voydanoff (34) found that perceived unfairness in the division of child rearing also predicted women's psychological distress, but was unrelated to men's distress.

2.3. *Summary*

A dominant focus of epidemiological research has been the paid work environment as a determinant of adult health. In contrast, relatively little is known about the characteristics of family work which may influence the well-being of men and women. This is an important gap in the research literature. The limited research which has been done concerning the relationship between family work and well-being has produced conflicting results, likely due, in part, to a lack of specificity in the measurement of family work (e.g. child rearing versus housework) and to varying participant characteristics in terms of partner, parent and employment status. The purpose of the study was to examine more nuanced relationships between the perceived division of household labor and psychological distress, taking into consideration other aspects of family work, such as the type and nature of the household task and the perceived fairness of the division of family work.

CHAPTER 3

Method

3.1 Participants

Data for this study was obtained from a gender, work, family, and health telephone survey conducted in Saskatoon, a mid-sized Canadian city, during 2005. The sampling frame included all registered phone numbers within city limits. Trained interviewers randomly dialed the phone numbers; in households with more than one eligible person, one was randomly selected to be interviewed. Sample eligibility was limited to those who were 1) English-speaking, 2) between the ages of 25 and 50 years, 3) employed full-time or part-time, and 4) the parent of at least one child under the age of 20 years. The goal of the study was to sample a broad cross-section of employed parents in terms of economic circumstances, marital status, and job type. Toward this end, approximately equal proportions of participants were selected in terms of gender, age group (25-34yrs; 35-54yrs), and educational attainment (high school or less; some postsecondary; university/college degree). Telephone interviews averaged 40 minutes in length and were conducted using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system.

The total sample size for the telephone survey was 1,160. For this analysis, participants were further restricted to those men and women who were partnered, in a dual-earner household, and who had at least one child in the household under the age of 12 years. Thus, for the present analysis, the sample size was 518 (314 women and 204 men).

3.2. Measures

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a detailed list of all measures used in the present analysis.

3.2.1 Measurement of the Dependent Variable

The Kessler-6 measure was used to assess non-specific psychological distress. The 6-item self-report questionnaire was designed to measure symptoms of behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and psychophysiological manifestations of psychological distress. (49) The Kessler-6 has been shown to be a sensitive screen for DSM-IV disorders. (50) Using Kessler et al.'s original 5-point response scale, respondents were asked to estimate how often in the past 30 days they experienced six symptoms of psychological distress. Sample items included "How often in the past 30 days did you feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?", "How often did you feel hopeless?", and "How often did you feel restless or fidgety?" Each respondent's scores were totaled across all the items with higher scores indicating higher levels of psychological distress. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.81.

3.2.2. Measurement of Independent Variables

3.2.2.1 Perceived Division of Household Labour

Based on the work of Goldberg and colleagues (15), a proportionate measure of the perceived household division of labour was used. For each of 15 household tasks, participants were asked to indicate, on a 5-point interval scale, how much of the work they performed compared to their partner: 1= very little/none; 2= some; 3= about half; 4= most; and 5=all. There were five child rearing

tasks (i.e., playing with children, travel for children) and eight housework tasks (i.g., washing dishes, paying bills). Responses to the items were summed to form two measures: 1) perceived proportionate amount of child rearing performed, and 2) perceived proportionate amount of housework performed. For each measure, the higher the score, the greater the perceived contribution made relative to one's partner. Scores could range from 8 to 40 for the housework measure and 5 to 25 for the child rearing measure.

Based on the work of Barnett and Shen, (19) housework tasks were further divided into high schedule control tasks (i.e., doing outdoor tasks, paying bills, and maintaining vehicles) and low schedule control tasks (i.e., preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, shopping, and washing and ironing). Thus, two additional measures were constructed: 1) perceived proportionate amount of high schedule control tasks performed, and 2) perceived proportionate amount of low schedule control tasks performed. For each measure, the higher the score, the greater the perceived contribution made relative to one's partner. Scores could range from 3 to 15 for the high schedule control measure and 5 to 25 for the low schedule control measure.

3.2.2.2 Perceived Fairness

The measures of perceived fairness were based on a question that asked respondents how they felt about fairness in household chores and child rearing (1=very unfair to me, 2=somewhat unfair to me, 3= fair to both, 4 =somewhat unfair to partner, 5 = very unfair to partner). (18) Participant responses were collapsed into three categories: 1) unfair to me, 2) fair to both, and 3) unfair to

partner. Dummy variables were then developed to separately represent perceived fairness of child rearing and perceived fairness of housework.

3.2.2.3 Covariates

Several variables were included as potential confounders: age of participant, number of children, educational attainment, perceived income adequacy, work hours, and work quality. Educational attainment was a categorical variable with four categories: high school or less, some post-secondary, college graduate, or university graduate. Participants' age, number of children, weekly work hours, perceived income adequacy, and work quality were treated as continuous variables. Perceived income adequacy was assessed with a single statement ("We have enough money to cover basic needs for food, housing and clothing"), with which participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated greater perceived income adequacy. Work quality, based on Robert Karasek's psychosocial model of job strain (7), was assessed by two scales: job demands comprised of 9 items (including pace, effort, volume of work, and conflicting demands, e.g., "My job requires working very fast") and decision latitude, comprised of 8 items (skill discretion includes 5 items, e.g. " My job requires me to be more creative"; decision authority includes 3 items, e.g., "I have a lot to say about what happens on my job"). Items for each work quality measure were summed, with higher scores indicating greater job demands/decision latitude.

3.4. Analysis

Data analyses involved a multi-stage process consisting of univariate, bivariate, and multivariable analyses using SPSS 15.0 for Windows. Preliminary data analysis included data cleaning, the testing of statistical assumptions and assessing the reliability (internal consistency) of study scales. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the demographic, social and mental health profile of study participants. Differences between men and women were tested using chi-square tests for categorical variables and t-tests for continuous measures. Additional descriptive analyses (chi-square tests for categorical variables and one-way ANOVAs for continuous variables) were conducted to explore the patterning of family work according to sociodemographic characteristics for each gender.

To address the three research questions, a series of multiple linear regression models were estimated with psychological distress as the outcome, adjusting for key confounders. (51) To ease interpretation, separate models were developed for men and women. Also, separate regression equations were computed for child rearing and housework to determine how these variables operate independently. For each regression analysis, the covariates were entered first into the model (i.e., age, number of children, educational attainment, perceived income adequacy, work hours, work quality), followed by the primary independent variables, which varied according to the research question.

Research Question 1: Is there an association between the perceived division of housework and psychological distress? Model 1: covariates; Model 2: perceived relative time in housework.

Research Question 2: Is there an association between the perceived division of child rearing and psychological distress? Model 1: covariates; Model 2: perceived relative time in child rearing.

Research Question 3: Is the perceived division of low schedule control housework tasks more strongly associated with psychological distress than the perceived division high schedule control housework tasks? Model 1: covariates; Model 2: perceived relative time in high schedule control housework tasks, perceived relative time in low schedule control housework tasks.

Research Question 4: Is perceived fairness in the division of housework/ child rearing more strongly associated with psychological distress than the perceived division of housework/ child rearing? *Housework* – Model 1: covariates; Model 2: perceived relative time in housework; Model 3: perceived fairness of housework. *Child rearing* – Model 1: covariates; Model 2: perceived relative time in child rearing; Model 3: perceived fairness of child rearing.

CHAPTER 4

Results

4.1. Descriptive Results

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who reported performing each of the housework and child rearing tasks by gender. Regarding housework responsibilities, a significantly higher proportion of women than men reported preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, shopping, paying bills and washing and ironing “most or all of the time”. Conversely, a greater proportion of men than women were involved to a greater degree in maintaining vehicles and doing outdoor tasks. For the child rearing activities, a higher percentage of women than men reported taking care of their children’s personal and medical care and helping and teaching them, “most or all of the time”. Men reported more frequent involvement than women in playing with their children and reading and talking to their children. No statistically significant gender differences were found for children’s travel arrangements.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Performing Various Family Work Activities,
by Gender

		Men	Women
		Percent (%) [†]	
<u>Housework</u>			
Preparing meals*	Most or all	26.96	67.83
	Half	37.74	24.84
	Very little or some	35.29	7.32
Washing dishes*	Most or all	31.86	58.60
	Half	42.64	25.80
	Very little or some	25.49	15.61
Cleaning house*	Most or all	25.49	64.33
	Half	29.90	27.39
	Very little or some	44.61	8.28
Doing outdoor tasks*	Most or all	77.94	29.64
	Half	13.24	24.84
	Very little or some	8.82	45.54
Shopping*	Most or all	26.47	67.52
	Half	30.88	26.75
	Very little or some	42.65	5.73
Washing and ironing*	Most or all	22.06	64.01
	Half	27.94	27.07
	Very little or some	50.00	8.92
Paying bills*	Most or all	35.78	57.96
	Half	31.86	17.20
	Very little or some	32.35	24.84
Maintaining vehicles*	Most or all	69.61	9.55
	Half	14.22	21.66
	Very little or some	16.18	68.79
<u>Child rearing</u>			
Personal/medical care*	Most or all	23.04	65.61
	Half	40.69	24.20
	Very little or some	36.27	10.19
Playing*	Most or all	26.96	22.61
	Half	63.24	67.83
	Very little or some	9.80	9.55

		Men	Women
Helping/teaching*	Most or all	30.39	40.45
	Half	53.43	50.64
	Very little or some	16.18	8.92
Reading/talking*	Most or all	34.31	33.76
	Half	46.08	56.69
	Very little or some	19.61	9.55
Travel	Most or all	38.24	38.54
	Half	41.67	46.82
	Very little or some	20.10	14.65

[†] Due to rounding errors, percentages may not add up to 100%

* $p \leq 0.01$

The distribution of the remaining study variables, including the combined measures of perceived relative time in housework and child rearing, by gender, are reported in Table 2. Compared to men, women were significantly older, and had more children, a higher level of decision latitude at work and better perceived income adequacy. There was also a significant difference in educational attainment between men and women, with a greater proportion of women than men reporting a college or university degree. Men reported spending significant more time on paid work compared to women and women reported spending significantly more time than men on housework and child rearing tasks relative to their partner. When the nature of the task was considered, men reported significantly more time in high schedule control tasks and women in low schedule control household tasks. A significantly higher proportion of women than men reported the perceived fairness of the division of housework as “unfair to me”. Conversely, a significantly greater percentage of men than women reported that

the current division of housework was “unfair to my partner”. No statistically significant gender differences emerged in regard to perceived fairness of child rearing tasks, job demands, or psychological distress.

Table 2: Sociodemographic Characteristics and Family Work, by Gender

	Men (n= 204)	Women (n=314)
	Mean (SD)	
Age*	33.98 (6.48)	35.57 (6.47)
Number of children*	1.74 (0.81)	1.98 (0.94)
Weekly work hours*	42.00 (10.39)	36.12(10.30)
Perceived income adequacy*	3.18 (0.95)	3.37 (0.86)
Decision latitude at work*	25.49 (5.29)	27.39 (4.80)
Job demands	24.28 (4.28)	24.29 (4.37)
Perceived relative time in housework* (range: 8-40)	25.17 (4.82)	27.47 (4.54)
Perceived relative time in child rearing* (range: 5-25)	15.69 (2.74)	17.01 (2.81)
Perceived relative time in low control tasks* (range: 5-25)	14.13 (4.37)	19.19 (3.18)
Perceived relative time in high control tasks* (range: 3-15)	11.04 (2.52)	8.29 (2.61)
Psychological distress (range: 6-30)	10.03 (3.59)	10.04 (3.86)
	Number (percent)	
Educational Attainment*		
High school or less	66 (32.35)	84 (26.75)
Some post-secondary	67 (32.84)	86 (27.38)
College/university	71 (34.84)	144 (45.85)
Perceived fairness of housework*		
Fair to both	99 (48.52)	171 (54.45)
Unfair to partner	87 (42.65)	40 (12.74)
Unfair to me	18 (8.82)	103 (32.80)
Perceived fairness of child rearing		
Fair to both	143 (70.10)	213 (67.83)
Unfair to partner	21 (10.29)	22 (7.01)
Unfair to me	40 (19.61)	79 (25.16)

*p ≤ 0.05

Table 3 provides an indication of how the composite measures of perceived relative time in housework and child rearing were patterned among women and men according to various sociodemographic characteristics. Regarding housework, women with a high school education (compared to women with some post secondary education or those with a university/college education) and a household income perceived as inadequate (compared to women with an adequate income) reported spending significantly more time in housework relative to their partners. In addition, women who perceived the current division of housework as “unfair to me” or “unfair to my partner” reported significantly more relative time in housework compared to women who perceived the distribution of housework as “fair to both”. Also, women who perceived the current division of child rearing as “unfair to me” reported more relative time in housework than women who perceived the division of child rearing as “fair to both” or “unfair to my partner”. Regarding child rearing, women with children over the age of five, compared to women with younger children, perceived spending significantly more time on child rearing relative to their partners. Also, women who considered the current division of child rearing and housework as “unfair to me” perceived spending significantly more relative time in child rearing than women who considered the divisions as “fair to both”

Fewer differences emerged among men, perhaps due, in part, to the smaller sample size. Men who were employed full-time reported spending significantly less relative time in child rearing than men employed part-time. Also, men who perceived the current division of child rearing as “unfair to me” spent

significantly more relative time on housework than men who considered the division as “fair to both” or “unfair to my partner”.

Table 3: Table 3: Perceived Relative Time Spent in Housework and Child Rearing by Sociodemographic Characteristics, Perceived Fairness and Gender

	Women		Men	
	Housework	Child rearing	Housework	Child rearing
Age				
25-34yrs	27.85	17.03	25.55	15.90
35-50yrs	27.11	16.99	24.60	15.37
Employment				
Full-time	27.40	16.94	24.89	*15.43
Part-time	27.56	17.09	25.88	16.58
Child ≤ 5 years of age				
Yes	27.68	*16.73	25.26	15.83
No	27.16	17.45	24.99	15.41
Educational attainment				
High school or less	*28.77	17.02	24.91	15.88
Some post-secondary	27.30	16.97	25.93	16.05
College/university	26.82	17.03	24.69	15.17
Perceived Income adequacy				
Adequate	*27.00	16.94	24.92	15.63
Inadequate	29.24	16.87	26.08	15.92
Perceived fairness of housework				
Unfair to me	*28.76	*17.61	26.78	15.83
Unfair to partner	28.50	16.70	24.95	15.85
Fair to both	26.46	16.73	25.08	15.52
Perceived fairness of child rearing				
Unfair to me	*29.09	*17.65	*26.70	16.55
Unfair to partner	26.68	16.37	22.62	15.54
Fair to both	26.96	16.84	25.11	15.05

*p ≤ 0.05

The relationship between the perceived fairness of housework and child rearing and sociodemographic characteristics are shown for women in Table 4 and men in Table 5. Among women, no statistically significant differences in perceived fairness of the division of child rearing emerged by sociodemographics. For housework, however, a significantly greater proportion of women with older than younger children perceived the current division of housework as unfair, as did women with an adequate household income versus those with an inadequate income.

Table 4: Perceived Fairness of Housework and Child Rearing, by Sociodemographic Characteristics, Women (%)

	Housework			Child rearing		
	Unfair to me	Fair to both	Unfair to partner	Unfair to me	Fair to both	Unfair to partner
Age						
25-34yrs	34.84	50.32	14.84	23.87	71.61	4.52
35-50yrs	30.82	58.49	10.69	26.42	64.15	9.43
Employment						
Full-time	30.77	53.21	16.03	23.72	67.95	8.33
Part-time	34.81	55.70	9.49	26.58	67.72	5.70
Child ≤ 5 years of age						
Yes	*27.60	55.21	17.19	22.92	70.31	6.77
No	40.98	53.28	5.74	28.69	63.93	7.38
Educational attainment						
High school or less	38.10	52.38	9.52	26.19	70.24	3.57
Some post-secondary	25.58	53.49	20.93	19.77	67.44	12.79
College/university	34.03	56.25	9.72	27.78	66.67	5.56
Income adequacy						
Adequate	*34.96	54.14	10.90	25.94	67.67	6.39
Inadequate	18.92	56.76	24.32	27.03	64.86	8.11

*p ≤ 0.05

More sociodemographic differences in perceived fairness of housework and child rearing emerged among men. With regard to housework, a greater proportion of older men and those with older children saw the current division as “fair to both” while a greater proportion of younger men and those with younger children saw the division as “unfair to my partner”. A higher percentage of men in the lowest educational group compared to men in the more advanced educational groups saw the division of housework as “unfair to me”, as did men in the adequate income category compared with inadequate. With regard to child rearing, a greater proportion of older men and those with older children saw the current division as “fair to both” while a greater proportion of younger men and those with younger children saw the division as “unfair to me”. Finally, a higher percentage of men with a college or university degree, compared to men in the other educational groupings, saw the current division of child rearing as “fair to both”.

Table 5: Perceived Fairness of Housework and Child Rearing, by Sociodemographic Characteristics, Men (%)

	Housework			Child rearing		
	Unfair to me	Fair to both	Unfair to partner	Unfair to me	Fair to both	Unfair to partner
Age						
25-34yrs	*9.09	41.32	49.59	*28.10	61.16	10.74
35-50yrs	8.43	59.04	32.53	7.23	83.13	9.64
Employment						
Full-time	9.66	51.72	38.62	20.69	71.03	8.28
Part-time	6.78	40.68	52.54	16.95	67.80	15.25
Child ≤ 5 years of age						
Yes	*10.37	42.22	47.41	*25.93	63.70	10.37

	Housework			Child rearing		
	Unfair to me	Fair to both	Unfair to partner	Unfair to me	Fair to both	Unfair to partner
No	5.80	60.87	33.33	7.25	82.61	10.14
Educational attainment						
High school or less	*21.21	43.94	34.85	*21.21	66.67	12.12
Some post-secondary	4.48	41.79	53.71	34.33	56.72	8.96
College/university	1.41	59.15	39.44	4.23	85.92	9.86
Income adequacy						
Adequate	*10.37	45.73	43.90	21.95	67.07	11.98
Inadequate	0.00	61.54	38.41	10.26	84.62	5.13

4.2. Multivariable Results

To address the study research questions, five separate multiple linear regressions were conducted. To improve concordance with the statistical assumptions of linear regression, the dependent variable, psychological distress, was square root transformed and one independent variable, perceived relative time in child rearing, was log-transformed. Inspection of the variance inflation factors and tolerance levels for each regression analysis indicated that multicollinearity was not a major concern. The main results of the multivariable analysis, detailed below, are organized according to research question.

Research Question 1: Is there an association between the perceived division of housework and psychological distress? The standardized coefficients for each variable, at each step in the regression analysis are shown for by gender for housework in Table 6. Regarding housework, after taking into account potential confounding variables in Model 1, the addition of perceived time spent in housework relative to one's partner contributed to explaining the dependent variable for women

($F_{1,290} = 4.37$, $p = 0.04$) but not for men ($F_{1,183} = 0.09$, $p=0.77$). Thus for women, the more perceived time spent in housework tasks relative to their partner, the greater the level of psychological distress.

Table 6: Standardized (Beta) Coefficients for OLS Regression of Psychological Distress on Covariates and Perceived Relative Time Spent in Housework, by Gender

	Men		Women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.05	.05	-.10	-.09
Number of children	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.06
Educational attainment ^a				
Some post-secondary	*-.19	*-.19	.11	.11
High school or less	-.08	-.08	.05	.03
Perceived income adequacy	.11	.11	**-.20	**-.19
Weekly work hours	-.01	-.00	-.04	-.04
Job demands	.15	.15	**-.26	**-.25
Decision latitude at work	*-.29	*-.28	*-.12	*-.12
Perceived relative time in housework		.02		*.12
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.05	0.14	0.15
F (df) for change in R ²	*2.40	0.09	**7.01	*4.37
	(8, 184)	(1, 183)	(8, 291)	(1,290)

^a compared to university/college graduates

* $p \leq 0.05$

** $p \leq 0.01$

Research Question 2: Is there an association between the perceived division of child rearing and psychological distress? The standardized coefficients for each variable, at each step in the regression analysis are shown for by gender for child rearing in Table 7. Regarding child rearing, after taking into account potential confounding variables in Model 1, perceived relative time spent in child rearing

added in Model 2 made a statistical significant contribution to explaining psychological distress for women ($F_{1,290} = 15.88, p = 0.00$) but not for men ($F_{1,183} = 1.20, p=0.35$). Thus for women, the more perceived time spent in child rearing relative to one's partner, the greater the psychological distress.

Table 7: Standardized (Beta) Coefficients for OLS Regression of Psychological Distress on Covariates and Perceived Relative Time Spent in Child Rearing, by Gender

	Men		Women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.05	.05	-.10	-.09
Number of children	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.04
Educational attainment ^a				
Some post-secondary	*-.19	*-.19	.11	.10
High school or less	-.08	-.08	.05	.05
Perceived income adequacy	.11	.11	**-.20	**-.21
Weekly work hours	-.01	.00	-.04	-.04
Job demands	.15	.14	**-.26	**-.24
Decision latitude at work	**-.29	**-.28	*-.12	*-.14
Perceived relative time in child rearing		.07		**-.21
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.05	0.14	0.18
F (df) for change in R ²	*2.40(8,184)	0.87(1,183)	*7.01(8,291)	**15.88(1,290)

^a compared to university/college graduates

* $p \leq 0.05$

** $p \leq 0.01$

Research Question 3: Is the perceived division of low schedule control tasks more strongly associated with psychological distress than the perceived division of high schedule control tasks? To address this research question, perceived relative time in housework work was further categorized according to

high schedule control and low schedule control tasks. The standardized coefficients are shown by gender in Table 8. For both men ($F_{2,182} = 0.45$, $p=0.64$) and women ($F_{2,289} = 2.18$, $p = 0.12$), the addition of perceived relative time spent in low schedule control tasks and high schedule control tasks in Model 2 did not statistically significantly add to explaining the dependent variable.

Table 8: Standardized (Beta) Coefficients for OLS Regression of Psychological Distress on Covariates and High and Low Schedule Control Housework Tasks, by Gender

	Men		Women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.05	.06	-.10	-.08
Number of children	-.05	-.06	-.06	-.07
Educational attainment ^a				
Some post-secondary	*-.19	*-.18	.11	.11
High school or less	-.08	-.07	.05	.04
Perceived income adequacy	.11	.10	**-.20	**-.18
Weekly work hours	-.01	-.02	-.04	-.04
Job demands	.15	*.16	**-.26	**-.24
Decision latitude at work	**-.29	**-.27	*-.12	*-.12
Perceived relative time in high control tasks		.07		.10
Perceived relative time in low control tasks		.00		.04
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.05	0.14	0.15
F (df) for change in R ²	*2.40 (8, 184)	0.45 (2, 182)	**7.01 (8, 291)	2.18 (2, 289)

^a compared to university/college graduates

* $p \leq 0.05$

** $p \leq 0.01$

Research Question 4: Is perceived fairness in the division of housework/ child rearing more strongly associated with psychological distress than the perceived division of housework/ child rearing? The results by gender for housework and child rearing are presented in Table 9 and Table 10, respectively. For housework, the addition of perceived fairness of housework in Model 3 accounted for a statistically significant amount of the variance in psychological distress, above and beyond that explained in Model 2 for men ($F_{2, 181} = 3.40$, $p = 0.04$) but not for women ($F_{2, 288} = 0.93$, $p = 0.40$). Thus, compared to men who perceived the division of housework as fair to both partners, men who perceived the division as unfair to themselves reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress. For child rearing, the addition of perceived fairness of child rearing in Model 2 contributed significantly to explain psychological distress for men ($F_{2, 181} = 6.17$, $p = 0.00$) but not women ($F_{2, 288} = 1.42$; $p = 0.24$). Men who perceived the division of child rearing as unfair to their partners were significantly more psychologically distressed than men who perceived the division as fair to both.

Table 9: Standardized (Beta) Coefficients for OLS Regression of Psychological Distress on Covariates, Perceived Relative Time in Housework and Perceived Fairness of the Division of Housework, by Gender

	Men			Women		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.05	.05	.07	-.10	-.09	-.09
Number of children	-.05	-.05	-.05	-.06	-.06	-.06
Educational attainment ^a						
Some post-secondary	*-.19	*-.19	*-.20	.11	.11	.12
High school or less	-.08	-.08	-.13	.05	.03	.03
Perceived income adequacy	.11	.11	.10	**-.20	**-.19	**-.19
Weekly work hours	-.01	-.00	-.03	-.04	-.04	-.03
Job demands	.15	.15	.15	**-.26	**-.25	**-.26
Decision latitude at work	**-.29	**-.28	**-.27	*-.12	-.12	-.12
Perceived relative time in housework		.02	-.00		*.12	*.12
Perceived fairness (housework) ^b						
Unfair to me			*.19			.01
Unfair to partner			.09			-.07
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.14	0.15	0.15
F (df) for change in R ²	*2.40 (8,184)	0.09 (1,183)	*3.40 (2,181)	**7.01 (8,291)	*4.37 (1,290)	0.93 (2,288)

^a compared to university/college graduates; ^b compared to fair to both
 *p ≤ 0.05 **p ≤ 0.01

Table 10: Standardized (Beta) Coefficients for OLS Regression of Psychological Distress on Covariates, Perceived Relative Time in Child Rearing and Perceived Fairness of the Division of Child Rearing, by Gender

	Men			Women		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.05	.05	.11	-.10	-.09	-.10
Number of children	-.05	-.05	-.09	-.06	-.04	-.04
Educational attainment ^a						
Some post-secondary	*-.19	-.19	*-.20	.11	.10	.08
High school or less	-.08	-.08	-.11	.05	.05	.05
Perceived income adequacy	.11	.11	.07	**-.20	**-.21	**-.21
Weekly work hours	-.01	.00	-.03	-.04	-.04	-.05
Job demands	.15	.14	.15	**-.26	**-.24	**-.23
Decision latitude at work	**-.29	**-.28	**-.21	*-.12	*-.14	*-.14
Perceived relative time in child rearing		.07	.08		**-.21	**-.23
Perceived fairness (child rearing) ^b						
Unfair to me			.15			-.07
Unfair to partner			**-.24			.06
Adjusted R ²	0.06	0.05	0.11	0.14	0.18	0.18
F (df) for change in R ²	*2.40(8,184)	0.87(1,183)	**6.17(2,181)	**7.01(8,291)	**15.88(1,290)	1.42(2,288)

^a compared to university/college graduates; ^b compared to fair to both

*p ≤ 0.05 **p ≤ 0.01

4.3. Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of this study were that the perceived division of family work was important for women's psychological well-being and the perceived fairness of the division of family work for men's. That is, for women, spending relatively more time than their partners in housework and child rearing was associated with greater psychological distress. For men, perceived unfairness to themselves in the division of housework and perceived unfairness to their partners in the division of child rearing were both associated with greater psychological distress. Perceived relative time spent in low or high schedule control tasks was not statistically associated with psychological distress for women or men.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Although considerable advances have occurred in documenting the gendered allocation of unpaid family work in Canada over the last several decades, relatively few epidemiological studies have addressed the potential consequences of this type of work for women's and men's mental health. The limited research which has examined the relationship between household work and well-being has produced conflicting findings. Conflicting findings may be due, in part, to the almost sole focus of researchers on time spent in family work as the key determinant, ignoring other characteristics of family work which may both vary across households and be associated with mental health outcomes. The objective of the present study was to examine associations between the perceived division of family work and psychological distress, taking into consideration the nature of the household task and the perceived fairness of that division. Of particular interest in the study was whether the nature of these relationships differed for men and women.

The most recent Canadian data indicates that although men have increased their participation in family work in recent decades, women still perform the majority, even when employed. (14) Similarly, in this study of employed parents from dual-earner households, men reported significantly more hours of paid work than women, and women reported spending more time in housework and child rearing relative to their partners. Also consistent with past research on the division of household labour, (16, 26, 52, 53) our findings indicate that within the

household, women report that they perform the majority of the low schedule control tasks or traditionally "feminine" tasks and men, the high schedule control tasks or traditionally masculine tasks. Canadian data has indicated that the division of labour between couples varies according to key sociodemographic factors in that the sharing of family work is most equal in couples when the wife earns at least \$100,000 annually or when only the wife in a couple has a university degree. (14) In this study, women with lower educational attainment and lower income adequacy reported doing more of the housework relative to their partners than more educationally and financially advantaged groups of women. When the educational status of both the respondent and her partner was considered, no statistically significant differences emerged for housework (data not shown). However, women who had a university degree while their partner did not reported spending more perceived relative time in child rearing than women in the opposite scenario (husband had a degree and wife did not)!

Regarding the perceived fairness of the division of household labour, a significantly greater proportion of women than men in this study viewed the division of housework as unfair to themselves, whereas a greater proportion of men than women perceived the division as unfair to their partner. Interestingly, over half of the women surveyed (54%) in this study considered the current division of housework as "fair to both". No statistically significant differences by gender emerged with respect to the perceived division of child rearing, with 68% of women and 70% of men perceiving it as "fair to both". Similar to our findings, a considerable number of studies show that most women with partners do not

perceive the division of labour in the home as unfair. (20, 26) In this study, only one-third of the women considered the perceived division of housework as unfair to themselves. Our data also showed a relationship between the perceived fairness of housework/child rearing and the relative amount performed; that is, women who perceived the current division of housework and child rearing as “unfair to me” reported spending significantly more time performing this work relative to their partner. Although measurement limitations did not allow us to estimate the actual amount of housework done by gender, previous research suggests that most women will perform up to two-thirds of the housework before they begin to perceive the division as unfair and men, up to about 36% of the household labour. (26) Previous research also suggests that women’s perceptions are influenced by their economic circumstances; that is, women who are more dependent on their partners for survival are generally more likely to consider performing a greater proportion of the household work as fair compared to women with more options. In this study, women with lower educational attainment and lower income adequacy reported doing more of the housework relative to their partners than more educationally and financially advantaged groups of women. However, a smaller proportion of women in the low income adequacy group considered the current division of household labour as “unfair to me”, though no statistically significant differences emerged for educational attainment. When the educational status of both the respondent and her partner was considered (not shown), no statistically significant differences in perceived fairness emerged for housework or child rearing.²

² Small cell sizes precluded such a comparison for men.

We were also interested in examining whether an unequal division of family work might be related to psychological distress for men and women. Separate analyses were conducted for child rearing and housework to explore how different types of family work may be independently associated with psychological distress. Consistent with some previous research (34-36) and inconsistent with others, (17, 18, 24) in our study, the perceived relative share of housework and child rearing was unrelated to men's psychological distress. For women, however, the perceived time spent in housework and child rearing relative to one's partner were independently and positively associated with psychological distress, after adjusting for various sociodemographics and quality of paid work. Previous research has produced results both inconsistent and consistent with the present findings. For example, although several studies have found no relationship between time spent in child rearing and women's mental health, (15, 34) others have. Des Rivieres-Pigeon and colleagues (40) compared the division of family work and psychological distress in women one year after childbirth in Canada, France and Italy. These researchers, similar to our study, found that in all three countries, women who indicated always doing more than half of the various child rearing activities had a higher rate of psychological distress. In an older, American survey of married men and women, (35) employment for women was associated with better mental health only when their husbands reported sharing in the child rearing; among women whose husbands did not share, no advantage of employment was found. On the other hand, and inconsistent with our findings, both of these studies found no association between the division of housework and

psychological distress. (35, 40) Yet other research has found, as we did, more time in housework to be associated with greater psychological distress or depression for women. (16, 17, 18, 36)

Measurement issues likely account for much of the confusion in the literature. A number of studies, (15, 16, 36, 40) similar to this one, have used proportional measures of family work, in which higher scores indicate doing a greater amount of household work relative to one's partner. Other studies, however, have attempted to determine the absolute amount of time spent in household work, (34) or included both absolute and proportional measures. (17 - 19) Also complicating the issue is how family work is operationally defined. A number of these studies included only housework, (18, 19) whereas others used a single, combined measure of housework and child rearing. (16, 36)

Goldberg and colleagues (15) have encouraged researchers "to consider the division of housework and child-care tasks as separate domains of influence and ...not lumping them together in analyses under the rubric of "family work" (p. 234). Barnett and Shen (19) argued for a need for researchers to categorize family work tasks according to the degree to which one has control over the schedule of work. These researchers found that that for both husbands and wives, the more time spent performing low schedule control tasks, the greater the level of psychological distress. In contrast, time spent on high schedule control tasks was unrelated to mental health outcomes for both men and women. Robinson and Spitze (24) found that greater participation in low schedule control tasks was associated with greater feelings of unhappiness among husbands, but it had no

impact on wives. In the present study, however, no statistically significant association between psychological distress and perceived relative time spent in high or low schedule control tasks emerged for women or men.

All in all, however, the preponderance of the evidence suggests that the more perceived time spent in housework and child rearing, the greater the risk of psychological distress, particularly for women. Why might greater proportionate time in family work be associated with an increase in psychological distress? An unequal division of labour may be distressing because family work, particularly housework, is typically viewed as inherently unpleasant and aversive, so the more one does of it the more distress it will cause (20). Alternatively, although multiple roles may enhance well-being, employed parents' high housework and child rearing demands may create role overload, resulting in time pressure and subsequent psychological strain. Although these explanations may seem logical for the domain of housework, the care of children is usually seen as more gratifying than housework tasks. However, spending more time on family work, including child rearing activities, may mean less time for parents to spend on other activities that may be more enjoyable, such as hobbies and socializing with friends. Research suggests that the time that parents and children spend together has changed over the last few decades, particularly among middle class parents, becoming more structured, focused on activities, and the achievement of goals: (23)

Children's organized leisure activities heighten the pace in middle class families and increased the amount of time that parents must

devote to the management of their children's organizational lives: it involves finding and negotiating programs, registering children, paying fees, reading literature, volunteering for fundraising, driving, attending practices, games, classes and recitals, speaking with instructors and coaches, reminding children, cajoling to practice, monitoring practice and praising them for their efforts...The implication is "hyper-parenting" where parents invest more and work harder to enhance their children's lives (p. 10-11).

Research also suggests that mothers, in addition to doing the majority of primary activity and physical child rearing, have less leisure than fathers and spend a larger proportion of their leisure time with their children than do fathers. (54) In addition, as noted by one researcher, while "there is a trend of convergence in the amount of time mothers and fathers are involved with their children, women continue to carry most of the responsibility dimension that involves the planning, scheduling, orchestrating and coordination of family activities". (23) Compared to mothers, fathers are generally not as familiar with or involved with the particularities of everyday family life (55).

An alternative explanation for the finding that an unequal division of child rearing is associated with distress involves equity theory (52). An unequal division of labour may violate couple's expectations of what is fair in a relationship, leading to distress if inequity is perceived. When individuals perceive that they are being either under-benefited or over-benefited in a relationship, distress will occur. Thus, enhanced psychological well-being is hypothesized as occurring when the division

household labour is seen as fair to both parties. In this study, one potential explanation for the relationship between women's psychological distress and greater participation in child rearing is that they may perceive the distribution of child rearing as inequitable. As one researcher suggested (40): "The participation of fathers in child care may not only be perceived as a form of support from the partner, but also as of value for the child and may correspond to the role of the father that women expect from their husbands/partners" (p. 407).

However, the results concerning perceived fairness are not consistent with such an explanation. That is, we found that perceived fairness of both child rearing and housework was unrelated to women's psychological distress. In contrast, psychological distress for men was influenced by their perceptions of equity. That is, compared to men who perceived the division of housework as fair to both partners, men who perceived the division as unfair to themselves reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress. Also, men who perceived the division of child rearing as unfair to their partners were significantly more psychologically distressed than men who perceived the division as fair to both. Relatively few studies have examined the relationship between perceived fairness and psychological distress. Several have reported a positive association between perceived unfairness in the division of housework and depressive symptoms for women, but not for men. (18, 24, 34) Only two studies could be located which considered fairness of child rearing in relation to mental health (15, 34) and only one of those (34) included men. That study (34) found that that for women perceived unfairness to self in child rearing showed statistically significant positive

relations with psychological distress for mothers but not fathers. For fathers, and similar to one previous study (18) perceived unfairness to self of paid work was related to psychological distress. In our study, men who perceived the division of child rearing as unfair to their partners experienced the highest level of psychological distress. The results of our study are puzzling and further research is clearly needed. Differences between studies could be due in part to the nature of the samples studied. Compared to previous research which has considered perceived fairness and mental health, (15, 18, 24, 34) our sample tended to be younger with younger children and was restricted to dual earner couples. Perhaps fathers in our study believed that, because of the greater time spent by mothers in childcare activities, they themselves were “missing out” on some of the joys of childrearing. Societal norms regarding fatherhood have changed over time, with men now expected to be more involved with their children than previous generations of fathers. (54) Further, qualitative research suggests that many fathers are aware of this expectation but find that the expectations associated with paid employment make it very difficult to fulfill such a responsibility: (56)

There was an increasing awareness on the part of these fathers that they *should* spend more time with their children, which reflects the dominant ideology that men are supposed to be available and nurturant as fathers. In spite of their vigilance to this cultural dictum, there was a feeling of guilt and of falling short of their self-imposed, externally reinforced expectations...Family time was considered to be costly, limited, and fixed in amount, and usually beyond their

control to change. The values embedded in this discourse suggest that work structures continue to dominate the way that men organize their time, resulting in the relegation of family time to a secondary or residual commitment...(p. 473-474)

5.1 Study Limitations

Our study is a cross-sectional design, which means we calculated the independent variables (exposure) and dependent variable (outcome) at the same time. Thus, we did not have enough evidence to establish the temporal relationship between psychological distress and family work; that is, it is entirely possible, for example, that women's experience of psychological distress actually preceded the unequal division of child rearing and housework. Also, all of our measures were self-reported. Previous research suggests that both men and women tend to overestimate their own contributions in direct-question surveys and to double-count time spent in simultaneous activities. (57) Moreover, men are found to be more unreliable than women in evaluating their amount of work on the labour market, while the opposite is the case for unpaid household work, with women underreporting their contribution more than men. (57-60) Another limitation of this study is the use of proportionate measures to calculate the division of household labour. Using proportional measures does not provide information on how much time is exactly spent on each household task. Also, we did not have information on whether other family members (e.g., children) contributed to household work. This may be an important oversight given that In Canada in 2001, approximately 40% of adult children aged 20-29 lived with their parents at some

point. Also, our measure of perceived fairness of child rearing and housework was based on a single item and obviously extremely subjective, making it difficult to know precisely how the question was interpreted by participants. Another limitation of the present study was that, although we were interested in the division of family work in dual earner households, we surveyed individuals rather than couples.

Finally, it is important to note that the amount of variance explained by our regression models was quite modest, ranging between 5% and 11% for fathers and between 14% and 18% for mothers. Thus, as in most studies additional factors need to be considered as sources of psychological distress for mothers and fathers. In our study, we did not include emotional work (e.g., conflict mediation, providing comfort and encouragement to partner and children) in the division of household tasks, but some articles revealed that husbands' performance of emotional work, as compared to performance of both housework and child rearing tasks, had the strongest positive effect on wives' marital well-being. (13) Also, some other types of family work might be related to psychological distress, but not included in our study, such as coordinating family activities, volunteering, and coaching teams.

5.2 Implications for Future Research

Our understanding of the relationship between unpaid work and health is rudimentary at this point in time. Longitudinal research with couples is clearly needed to tease out the temporal relationship between family work and the development of psychological distress. More research with diverse samples of participants, in terms of life stage, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position,

is also required. (61) However, prior to considerations of study design, the measurement of family work needs to advance. An important assumption in quantitative research is that our measures are closely linked to the constructs they are intended to represent. As observed by DeVellis, (62) “when the relationship between the variable and its indicator is weak, confusing the measure with the phenomenon it is intended to reveal can lead to erroneous conclusions”. (p. 15)

Family work is complex and its study poses a number of conceptual and methodological challenges. For future research, measures that more fully capture the complexity of the division of family work and considerations of perceived fairness need to be included. Toward this end, qualitative research with couples would be particularly useful as a means of expanding our understanding of the nature of family work, the meaning mothers and fathers attach to housework and childrearing, and how they negotiate the sharing of such work within the family.

5.3 Conclusion

In contrast to paid work, relatively little is known about the potential health consequences of unpaid household labour for women and men. This lack of research attention is likely the result of numerous factors, ranging from the view of family work as “women’s work” and therefore unimportant, (13) to the conceptual and measurement difficulties in accurately characterizing a role described by some as “...largely mental, spread over time, and mixed in with other activities, often looking like other things”. (63, p. 135). What is known, however, is that family work in Canada remains divided by gender, with women still retaining primary responsibility for the bulk of domestic work. The results of this study, combined with previous

research, suggest that the gendered nature of household work has implications for the psychological well-being of both women and men and that both paid and unpaid work needs to be considered when examining the social determinants of parents' psychological well-being.

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APPENDIX I:

Measures

Age

How old are you? _____

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Educational attainment

How much education do you have?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ Graduated from high school, but didn't go to a postsecondary institution
- ☐ Some postsecondary training, but didn't graduate
- ☐ Graduated from a college
- ☐ Graduated from a university

Perceived income adequacy

We have enough money to cover basic needs for food, housing and clothing.

1 2 3 4

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1-----2-----3-----4

Work hours

Approximately how many hours a week do you usually work at this job?
If you usually work extra hours (paid or unpaid), please include these hours.

____ Hours

Job Content Questionnaire

Strongly Disagree

1-----2-----3-----4

Strongly Agree

Psychological demands				
My job requires working very fast.	1	2	3	4
My job requires working very hard.	1	2	3	4
I am not asked to do too much work.	1	2	3	4
I have enough time to get the job done.	1	2	3	4
The demands that other people make of me often conflict.	1	2	3	4
My job requires long periods of intense concentration on the task.	1	2	3	4
My tasks are often interrupted before I can finish them so that I have to go back to them later.	1	2	3	4
My job is very hectic.	1	2	3	4
Waiting on work from other people or departments often slows me down on my job.	1	2	3	4
People I work with are competent in doing their jobs.	1	2	3	4
Decision latitude				
People I work with take a personal interest in me.	1	2	3	4
People I work with are friendly.	1	2	3	4
People I work with are helpful in getting the job done.	1	2	3	4
My job requires that I learn new things.	1	2	3	4
My job involves a lot of repetitive work.	1	2	3	4

My job requires me to be creative.	1	2	3	4
My job requires a high level of skill.	1	2	3	4
I get to do a variety of different things on my job.	1	2	3	4
I have an opportunity to develop my own special abilities.	1	2	3	4
My job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own.	1	2	3	4
On my job, I have very little freedom to decide how I do my work.	1	2	3	4
I have a lot of say about what happens on my job.	1	2	3	4

Psychological Distress

b) During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel...

So depressed that nothing could cheer you up? Would you say you felt this way...

- ☐ None of the time
- ☐ A little of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ All of the time

Hopeless? Would you say you felt this way...

- ☐ None of the time
- ☐ A little of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ All of the time

Restless or fidgety? Would you say you felt this way...

- ☐ None of the time
- ☐ A little of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ All of the time

That everything was an effort? Would you say you felt this way...

- ☐ None of the time
- ☐ A little of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ All of the time

Worthless? Would you say you felt this way...

- ☐ None of the time
- ☐ A little of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ All of the time

Nervous? Would you say you felt this way...

- ☐ None of the time
- ☐ A little of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ All of the time

Perceived relative contribution to housework and child rearing

For each of the following household and child rearing tasks please indicate how much you do in comparison to your partner?

Preparing Meals. In comparison to your partner do you do...

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Washing dishes

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Cleaning house

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Doing outdoor tasks

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Shopping

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Washing and ironing

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Paying bills

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Maintaining vehicles

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Personal and medical care for your child(ren)

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Playing with your child(ren)

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Helping and teaching your child(ren)

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Reading and talking to your child(ren)

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Travel for your child(ren)

- ☐ Very little / none
- ☐ Some
- ☐ About half
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All

Perceived fairness of housework and child rearing

How fair do you think the amount of housework you do is compared to the amount your partner does? Would you say that it is...

- ☐ Very unfair to you
- ☐ Unfair to you
- ☐ Fair to both you and your partner
- ☐ Unfair to your partner
- ☐ Very unfair to your partner

How fair do you think the amount of child care you do is compared to the amount your partner does? Would you say that it is...

- ☐ Very unfair to you
- ☐ Unfair to you
- ☐ Fair to both you and your partner
- ☐ Unfair to your partner
- ☐ Very unfair to your partner

APPENDIX II:

Ethics Approval



Ethics Office

Room 302 Kirk Hall
117 Science Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8 Canada
Telephone: (306) 966-2975
Facsimile: (306) 966-2069

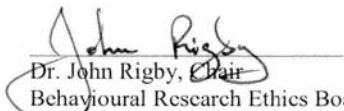
To: Bonnie Janzen (Wenting Tao)
Date: January 8, 2008
Re: "Gender, Work, Family and Health" (Beh 04-64)

The study entitled, "Gender, Work, Family and Health" is exempt from the Research Ethics Board review process. This decision is based on the information provided in your letter to the Ethics Office on December 21, 2007.

Article 3.3 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (1998) specifies that REB review and approval is not required to conduct a secondary analysis of data that cannot be linked to individuals, and for which there is no possibility that individuals can be identified in any published reports.

It should be noted that though your project is exempt of ethics review, your project should be conducted in an ethical manner (i.e. in accordance with the information that you submitted). It should also be noted that any deviation from the original methodology and/or research question should be brought to the attention of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board for further review.

Sincerely,


Dr. John Rigby, Chair
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan