

Does the birth of a child change the division of household tasks between partners?

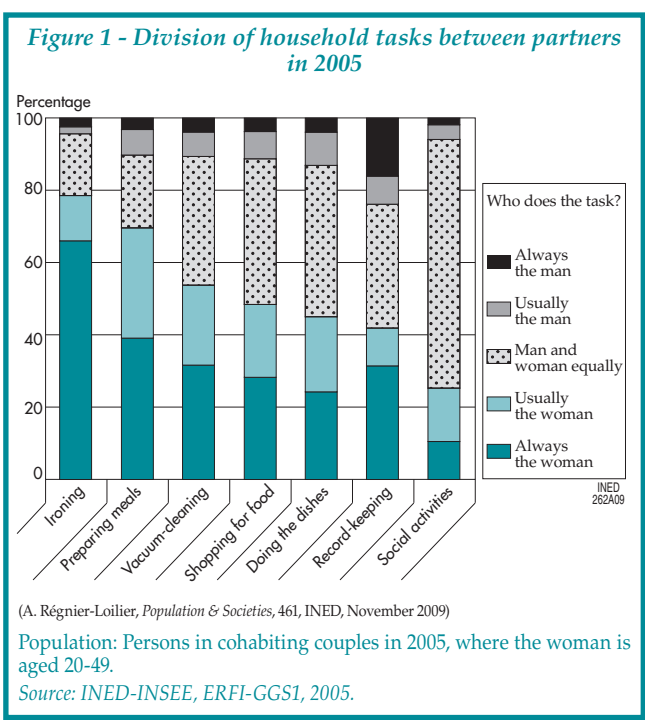
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It is well known that household tasks are unequally shared between men and women. Women often do most of the housework, although a trend towards greater equality is perceptible among the younger generations. Do men contribute more to household tasks after a baby is born? Or does the gender gap grow even wider? Arnaud Régnier-Loilier addresses this question using data from the ERFI survey (Étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles, the French version of the international Generations and Gender Survey).

In France, women do almost 80% of household tasks [1], and this gender imbalance is even higher when families are large and when the smallest child is young [2]. As shown by the ERFI survey (Box 1) [3], there are persistent inequalities in this area. In 2005, among women living in a union aged 20-49, 8 in 10 “always” or “usually” do the ironing, 7 in 10 prepare the daily meals, half do the vacuum-cleaning and food shopping and 4 in 10 do the dishes and keep the financial records (Figure 1). Organizing joint social activities (inviting friends, planning outings) is more often shared equally, although when this is not the case, the task generally falls upon women.

◆ The arrival of a child increases inequalities...

The ERFI survey interviewed the same people again in 2008, three years after the first survey round, so that changes over the period could be recorded. A birth widens the gender gap in the sharing of household tasks, especially for couples who already had one or more children at the first interview and who now have an additional child aged below three. The imbalance



increases for most tasks: preparing meals, shopping for food, vacuum-cleaning, keeping financial records and, to a lesser extent, organizing joint social activities.

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Taking the case of meal preparation for example, (Figure 2), the division between partners did not change from 2005 to 2008 for couples who did not have another child between the two survey dates. We note, however, a large difference between childless women and mothers among these couples in 2005, with the 6 in 10 of the former “always” or “usually” preparing the meals, versus three-quarters of the latter. Among couples who had a child between the two survey dates, the proportion of women who “always” or “usually” prepare the meals rises from 51% to 58% for those with a first child, and from 72% to 77% for those with an additional child. A similar trend is observed for food shopping and vacuum-cleaning.

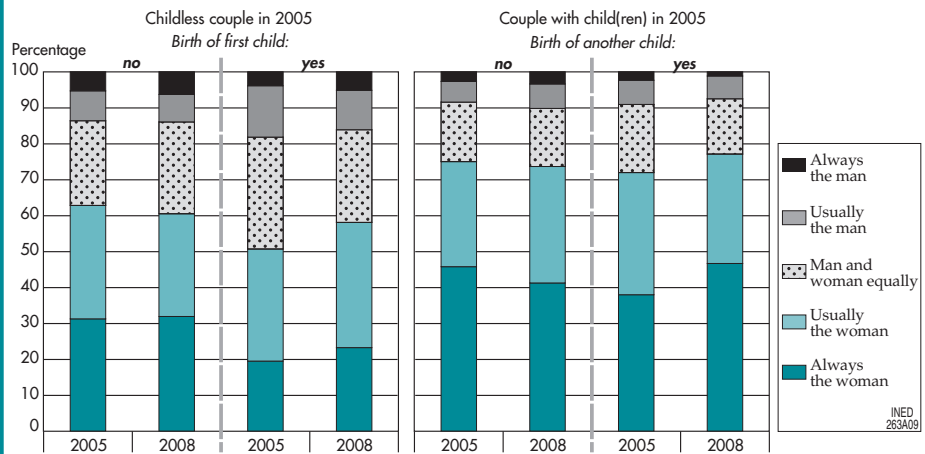
For record-keeping and ironing, on the other hand, only the arrival of a first child widens the gender gap. The proportion of couples where the woman “always” does the ironing, for example, increases from 57% to 66%. For the organization of joint social activities, it is the birth of a second or higher child which increases the gap, with the proportion of couples where the woman “always” does this task rising from 10% to 16%. For dish washing, the gap remains unchanged both for first and subsequent births.

◆ ... partly because women reduce their working hours

The birth of a child obliges couples to adjust their work schedules, and this affects women in particular [4]: 25% of first-time mothers and 32% of mothers with an additional child gave up work or shortened their working hours between the two ERFI surveys (Figure 3). This may partly explain their increased share of domestic tasks. A change in employment status may also have an effect, whether or not a child has been born.

We sought to separate out the different factors and determine the influence of each, “all other things being equal” (Figure 4). First, we estimated the influence of the birth of a child without considering the effect of other factors, i.e. respondent’s age, sex, division of the task in 2005, possible change in woman’s employment status (reduced working hours or withdrawal from labour market). The arrival of a child, be it a first or additional birth, modifies the division of tasks between spouses in a direction that is “unfavourable” to the woman for all tasks except doing the dishes (Figure 4, one-dimensional model; see Box 2 for a definition of an “unfavourable” change). In the next step, we took the influence of these factors into account. The effect of a birth now becomes much weaker and non-significant for many tasks except ironing and keeping financial

Figure 2 - Who prepares the meals in the couple? Change between 2005 and 2008 with or without birth of a child

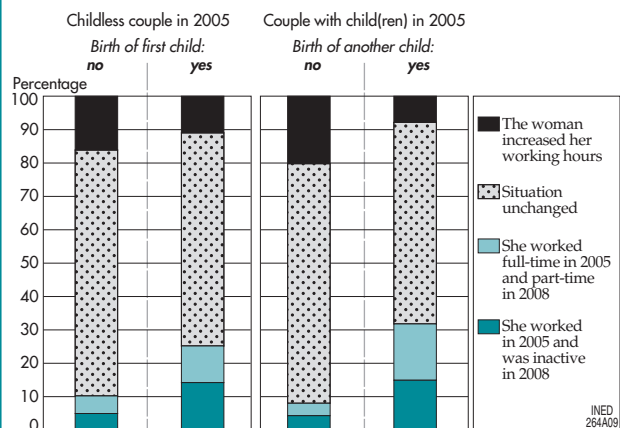


(A. Régnier-Loilier, *Population & Societies*, 461, INED, November 2009)

Population: Persons in a union living with the same partner in 2005 and 2008, where the woman is aged 20-49 in 2005.

Source: INED-INSEE, ERFI-GGSI, 2005-2008.

Figure 3 - Change in woman's employment situation between 2005 and 2008 with or without the birth of a child



(A. Régnier-Loilier, *Population & Societies*, 461, INED, November 2009)

Population: Persons in a union living with the same partner in 2005 and 2008, where the woman is aged 20-49 in 2005.

Source: INED-INSEE, ERFI-GGSI, 2005-2008.

records (Figure 4, “all other things being equal” model). The change in the woman’s employment status, on the other hand, explains much of the change in household organization. If the woman shortens her working hours or leaves work, she more often takes over the most routine household tasks (preparing daily meals, doing the dishes).

◆ Women resent the widening of the gender gap after a birth

At each visit, the interviewer asked the respondent if she was satisfied with the way household tasks were shared between her and her spouse (see Boxes 1 and 2 for the measure of satisfaction). The least satisfied women are those whose spouses contribute practically nothing to household organization [5].

Box 1

The “Étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles” survey (ERFI)

The ERFI survey is the French version of the European Generations and Gender Survey conducted in around twenty industrialized countries (www.unece.org). It comprises three rounds of interviews on the same sample of adults conducted at three year intervals. The first interviews were performed in 2005 by INED and INSEE. A total of 10,079 men and women aged 18-79 were asked about their employment status, family situation, domestic organization, fertility, relations with parents, etc. [3] (more information is available at www-erfi.ined.fr). Among the respondents in 2005, 88% agreed to be contacted again three years later for a second interview. In 2008, 6,576 people took part in the second survey round, while the remainder could not be interviewed for various reasons (loss of contact, refusal to take part, death, etc.) A third round is scheduled for 2011.

Domestic organization is measured in the ERFI survey by means of questions to determine who in the household does one or other task most frequently. The response categories are: “always me”, “usually me”, “me and my partner equally”, “usually my partner”, “always my partner”, “always or usually other persons in the household”, “always or usually someone not living in the household”, “not applicable”. Seven household tasks are covered: preparing daily meals, doing the dishes, shopping for food, ironing, vacuum-cleaning the house, paying bills and keeping financial records and last, organizing joint social activities.

The answers to the question “How satisfied are you with the division of household tasks between you and your partner/spouse?” (score from 0 to 10, with 0 being “totally dissatisfied” and 10 “very satisfied”) serve to measure the level of satisfaction regarding the way household tasks are shared by the couple.

The data from the first two survey waves were used to identify the changes occurring between 2005 and 2008 and to match them against changes in the respondents’ family situations (in this case the birth of a child).

Since the aim is to measure the influence of a birth on domestic organization, we focus here exclusively on persons living with the same partner in 2005 and in 2008 (a change of partner may lead to a redefinition of task-sharing that is independent of the birth of a child). Only couples where the woman was still of childbearing age in 2005 (women aged 20-49 in 2005) were taken into account. The analysis is thus based on a sample of 2,164 couples, among whom 410 had a child between 2005 and 2008.

The level of satisfaction also varies according to the number of dependent children: while 30% of childless women gave a score of below 8 out of 10, the proportion was 40% for mothers of two children and almost 50% for mothers of three or more children. The number of children has no effect on men’s level of satisfaction, however.

Women’s dissatisfaction increases after the birth of a child, the first child especially, and the proportion who give a score of below 8 out of 10 rises from 24% to 32% (Figure 5). This trend is linked to the growing gender gap in the division of household tasks. The woman reports being “less satisfied” in 38% of cases where the change is not in her favour for at least three tasks, 18% when two tasks are concerned and 3% when there is no change in the division of tasks (Figure 6). On the other hand, women who did not have a child

Box 2

Measuring changes in the division of tasks between partners and the degree of satisfaction

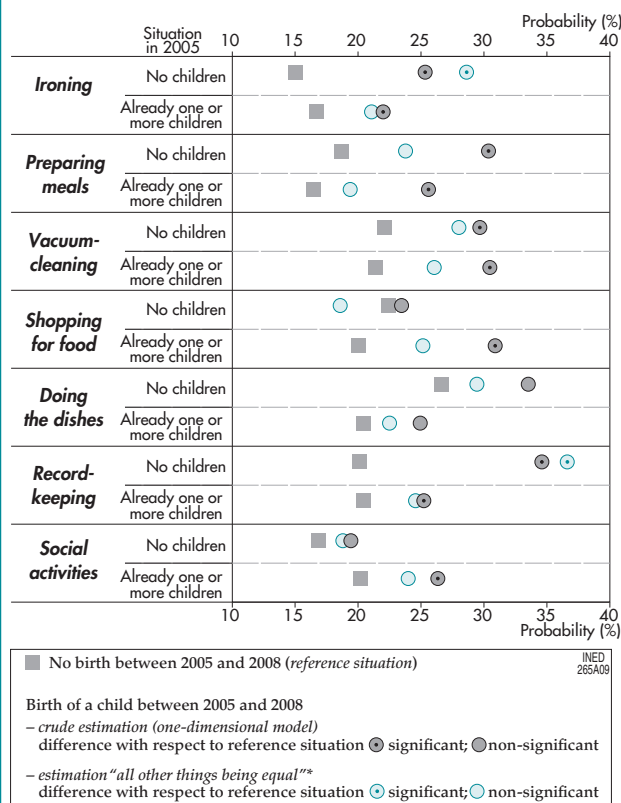
To measure changes in domestic organization within the couple, we compare the same respondent’s answers in 2005 with those given in 2008 for each household task. Three types of change are distinguished:

- “no change”: for a given task, the answers are strictly identical on both dates;
- “unfavourable to the woman”: the responses change between the two dates towards a more unfavourable situation for the woman;
- “unfavourable to the man”: reverse situation.

Regarding changes in the level of satisfaction, we consider that:

- satisfaction is “identical” when the score given on both survey dates is the same or moves up or down by one point only;
- the woman is “less satisfied in 2008” if the score is at least two points below that of 2005;
- the woman is “more satisfied in 2008” if the score is at least two points above that of 2005.

Figure 4 - Probability that the division of tasks changed unfavourably for the woman between 2005 and 2008; role of a birth in the couple



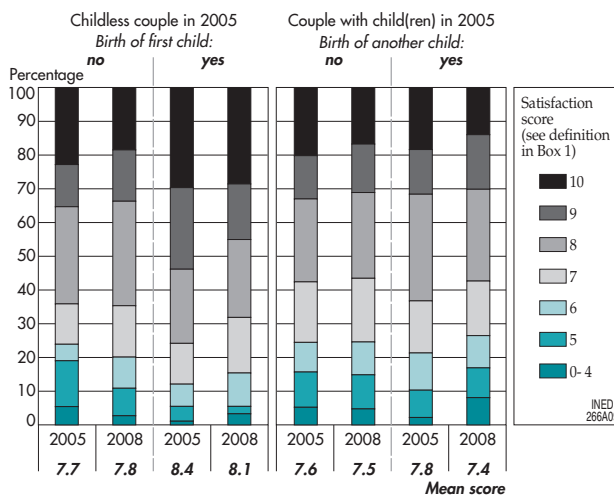
(A. Régnier-Loilier, *Population & Societies*, 461, INED, November 2009)

*Estimation taking account of the influence of changes in female labour force participation between 2005 and 2008, respondent’s sex and age in 2005 and division of tasks in 2005.

Interpretation: Among childless couples in 2005 and 2008, there is a 19% probability that the sharing of meal preparation changed unfavourably for the woman between the two dates (no birth between the two dates, reference situation ■). The probability is 30% if a first child was born between 2005 and 2008 (crude estimation, ●), and the difference with respect to 19% is significant. Taking account of the influence of other factors (“all other things being equal” model, ○), this probability falls to 24% and is no longer significantly different from 19%.

Source: INED-INSEE, ERFI-GGS1, 2005-2008.

Figure 5 - Change in women's satisfaction regarding the division of household tasks within the couple, with or without the birth of a child

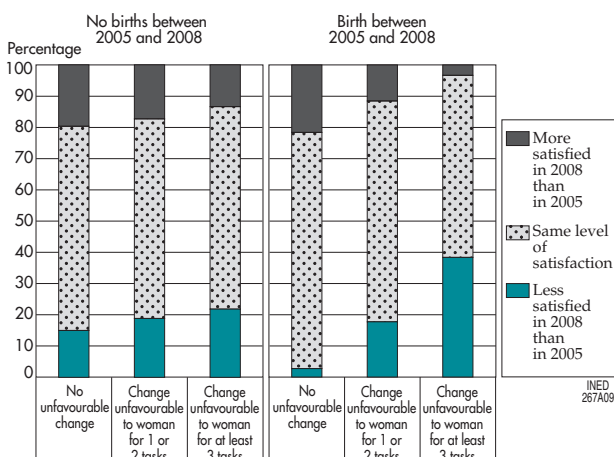


(A. Régnier-Loilier, *Population & Societies*, 461, INED, November 2009)

Population: Women in a union, living with the same partner in 2005 and 2008, aged 20-49 in 2005.

Source: INED-INSEE, ERFI-GGS1, 2005-2008.

Figure 6 - Change in women's satisfaction between 2005 and 2008 by number of tasks whose division has evolved unfavourably for the woman in 2008



(A. Régnier-Loilier, *Population & Societies*, 461, INED, November 2009)

Population: Women in a union, living with the same partner in 2005 and 2008, aged 20-49 in 2005.

Source: INED-INSEE, ERFI-GGS1, 2005-2008.

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between 2005 and 2008, give the same satisfaction score on both dates, even if the division of tasks has shifted unfavourably for them.

The arrival of a child generates more work and new parental tasks, again generally assumed by women. Alongside the growing gender gap in the division of household tasks, this could explain the stronger dissatisfaction of women with children.

The arrival of a child widens the gender imbalance in the sharing of household tasks, generally at the expense of women. It is they who tend to give up their jobs, and it is they who assume a larger burden of domestic tasks. Birth and withdrawal from the labour market act here in synergy. Despite the ideal of equality, there is still a substantial gender gap in the division of domestic labour.

ABSTRACT

As part of the ERFI survey (*Étude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles*) conducted by INED, the same couples were asked twice, in 2005 and 2008, about the division of household tasks and their degree of satisfaction. In 2005, among women aged 20-49, 8 in 10 report that they "always" or "usually" do the ironing, 7 in 10 prepare the daily meals and half do the vacuum-cleaning and the shopping for food. The birth of a child increases inequalities. In 2008, 38% of women who had a child between the two survey dates and for whom the division of at least three tasks changed unfavourably expressed greater dissatisfaction than in 2005. Only the division of dish washing and organization of social activities remain largely unchanged.

A new director for INED

Chantal Cases was appointed director of the Institut national d'études démographiques (INED) on 1 October. She replaces François Héran, in office since 1999. An economist and statistician, Chantal Cases is a graduate of the L'école nationale de la statistique et de l'administration économique (ENSAE). Before coming to INED, she headed the Institut de recherche et documentation en économie de la santé (IRDES). She has also worked as a research associate at CREST and occupied a range of senior positions in public statistics, at INSEE and as deputy director of the research and statistics department (DREES) of the Ministry of Health. Her recent research has focused on inequalities in health and in access to health insurance, living conditions of older adults with chronic diseases and health system performance. She is a member of the Haut Conseil de la santé publique, the Haut Conseil pour l'avenir de l'assurance maladie and the Conférence nationale de santé.