

Changes in Time Spent on Housework and Child Care among Korean Parents

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1. Introduction

In response to persistent low-level fertility, the Korean government in 2006 embarked on the Basic Plan on Low Fertility and Aging Society, which, since its implementation, has substantially increased public childcare support. But the total fertility rate remained low (as low as 1.19 in 2013) and the sharing of housework and child care still remains unequal between men and women, with many working parents still struggling to balance work and family.

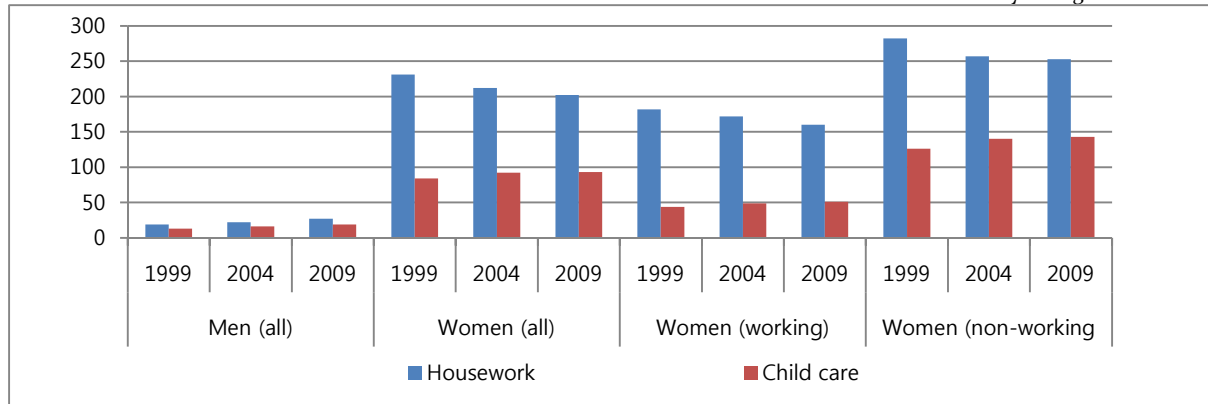
This study is set out to examine changes taken place in time spent on housework and child care during the period 1999~2009 and their policy implications. We used Statistics Korea's *Time Use Survey* in our analysis of changes occurred over the sample period in the amount of time spent by Korean parents on child care and housework. The sample of analysis are married Korean men and women aged 20~59. The dependent variables used in this study are "time spent on housework" and "time spent on child care."

In analyzing the factors that brought about changes in time spent on housework and child care during the period 2004~2009, we employed the Oaxaca-Blinder approach, the Juhn-Murphy-Pierce (JMP) method and the Unconditional Quantile Regression model. The factors regarded as responsible for changes in time spent on housework and child care were decomposed into "structural" and non-structural" components using the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition technique. The JMP and the Unconditional Quantile Regression methods were used to estimate changes in time spent on these activities by different time-use groups.

2. Changes in Korean parents' time spent on housework and child care

The amount of time spent both on housework and on child care increased for men over the period 1999~2009, but men still spend only a limited amount of time doing these activities. Women decreased time spent on housework and increased time spent on child care, still allocating a considerable part of their lives to these activities. Both the decrease in time spent on housework and the increase in time spent on child care were more salient among non-working women than among working women.

<Figure 1> Time Spent on Housework and Child Care by Korean Men and Women, 1999~2009
Unit: daily average in minutes

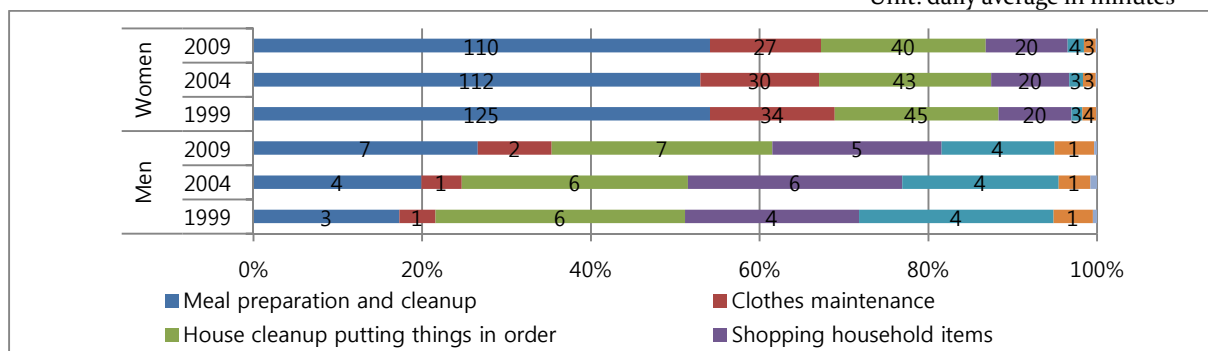


Note: The sample consists of married parents (aged 20~59) with children aged 0~18 yrs
Source: *Time Use Survey* for 1999, 2004, and 2009, Statistics Korea

Although there still persist marked disparities between men and women in the amount of time they spent on housework and child care, these differences have somewhat blurred over the 10-year period. The activities in which the gender differences in time use have become less obvious are those under the category of "home management," for which women's unpaid work can relatively easily be supplanted by purchased services. In the realm of child care, where replacing parents' time with purchased services is difficult, the effect of traditional parental gender roles still seems at play to a great extent.

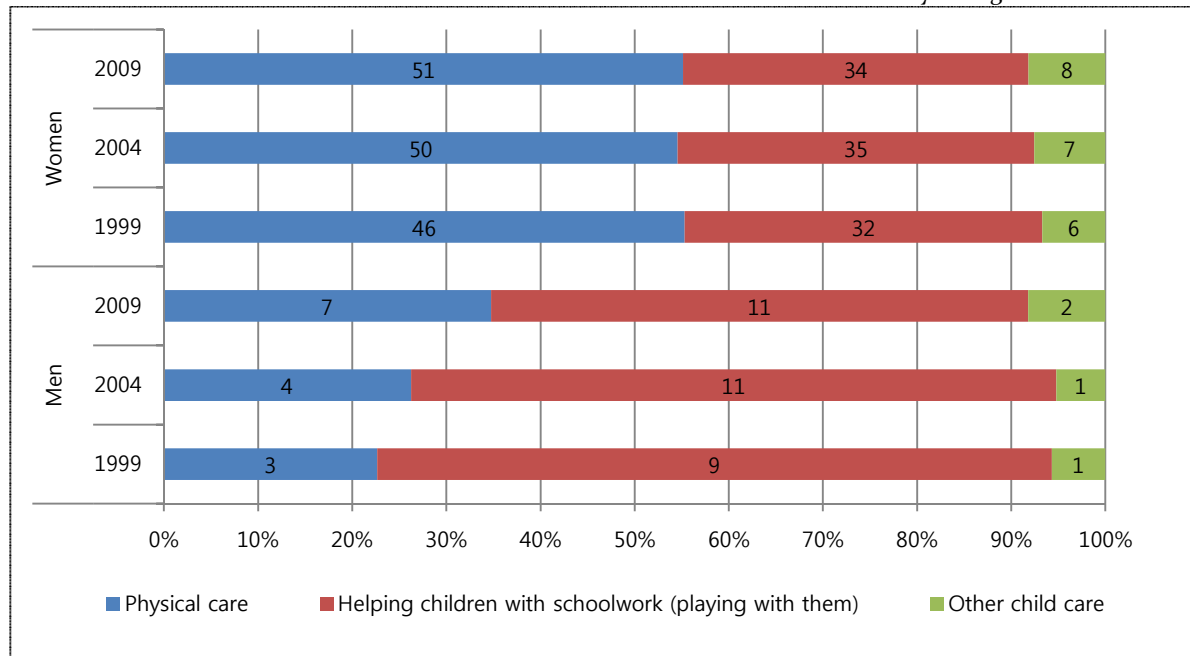
For men, "house cleanup and putting things in order" occupied the largest share in the time they spent on housework in 1999; by 2009 the portion of "meal preparation and cleanup" had increased substantially. While the largest portion in fathers' time spent on child care was spent on "helping children with schoolwork" (and "playing with children") in 1999, there was a considerable increase in time spent on "physical care" over the 10 years that followed. For women, time spent on housework decreased overall. The decrease occurred in time spent in the "housework" category was most notable, in descending order, in "meal preparation and cleanup," "clothes maintenance", and "house cleanup and putting things in order." The increase in mothers' time spent on child care was due in large part to the increase in their time spent on "physical care," an area to which women's role as mother has been regarded essential.

<Figure 2> Changes in Time Spent on Housework and Child Care, by Type of Activity, 1999~2009
Unit: daily average in minutes



Note: The sample consists of married parents (aged 20~59) with children aged 0~18 yrs
Source: *Time Use Survey* for 1999, 2004, and 2009, Statistics Korea

<Figure 3> Changes in Time Spent on Housework and Child Care, by Type of Activity, 1999~2009
Unit: daily average in minutes



Note: The sample consists of married parents (aged 20~59) with children aged 0~18 yrs

Source: Time Use Survey for 1999, 2004, and 2009, Statistics Korea

The change was greater at the top than at the bottom of the distribution of time spent on housework and child care. For men, little change was observed at the bottom 50 percent of the distribution, while the top 25 percent showed a substantial change. For women, the decline in the amount of time spent on housework was sharper at the top of the distribution than at the bottom, and the increase in time spent on child care was greater also at the top.

3. Decomposition of changes in time spent on housework and child care

Using the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition method, we looked at the rate of participation in housework and child care during the period 2004~2009 and the quantity of time the participants spent on these activities. Also, we decomposed the changes in the amount of time spent into structural and non-structural components. For men, there were significant increases in all the three dependent variables in the category of "time spent on housework" (see Table 1). These changes were assumed to have been attributed not to structural factors such as demographic trends, but to non-structural factors such as social norms and perceptions. There was no significant change in the rate of women's participation in housework and child care over the sample period, whereas there was a significant difference between the amount of time spent by all participants and the amount of time spent by all women participants. The decrease in time spent on housework by women is attributable not only to non-structural factors but also, to a considerable extent, to structural factors, while the increase in the amount of time spent on child care is thought to have been due much more to non-structural factors than to structural ones.

<Table 1> Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition of Changes in the Distribution of Time Spent on Housework and Child Care, 2004~2009

| | Time spend on housework | | | | | | Time spent on childcare | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|----------|
| | Model 1: participation rate | | Model 2: log(amount of time spent) | | Model 3: amount of times spent | | Model 1: participation rate | | Model 2: log (amount of time spent) | | Model 3: amount of time spent | |
| | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men |
| 2004 | 0.989*** | 0.392*** | 5.200*** | 3.610*** | 212.6*** | 22.07*** | 0.765*** | 0.268*** | 4.199*** | 3.701*** | 86.35*** | 15.18*** |
| | [0.00100] | [0.00501] | [0.00642] | [0.0149] | [1.110] | [0.476] | [0.00416] | [0.00455] | [0.0124] | [0.0165] | [1.066] | [0.374] |
| 2009 | 0.989*** | 0.485*** | 5.159*** | 3.704*** | 205.3*** | 29.90*** | 0.760*** | 0.332*** | 4.273*** | 3.779*** | 90.55*** | 21.20*** |
| | [0.00129] | [0.00647] | [0.00842] | [0.0171] | [1.373] | [0.686] | [0.00535] | [0.00610] | [0.0158] | [0.0199] | [1.381] | [0.592] |
| Difference | -8.85E-05 | 0.0931*** | -0.0412*** | 0.0940*** | -7.296*** | 7.836*** | -0.00478 | 0.0648*** | 0.0736*** | 0.0778*** | 4.205** | 6.025*** |
| | [0.00163] | [0.00818] | [0.0106] | [0.0227] | [1.766] | [0.835] | [0.00677] | [0.00760] | [0.0201] | [0.0258] | [1.745] | [0.700] |
| Structural factors | -0.00119 | -0.0057 | -0.0257*** | 0.00398 | -4.169*** | -0.152 | -0.0117*** | -0.00909* | -0.0561*** | 0.0182 | -5.046*** | 0.0945 |
| | [0.000828] | [0.00474] | [0.00655] | [0.0144] | [1.090] | [0.527] | [0.00409] | [0.00509] | [0.0152] | [0.0175] | [1.339] | [0.456] |
| Non-structural factors | 0.0011 | 0.0988*** | -0.0155 | 0.0900*** | -3.127* | 7.988*** | 0.00691 | 0.0739*** | 0.130*** | 0.0596** | 9.251*** | 5.930*** |
| | [0.00179] | [0.00925] | [0.0102] | [0.0258] | [1.702] | [0.905] | [0.00656] | [0.00766] | [0.0160] | [0.0280] | [1.344] | [0.683] |
| Sample size | 16,787 | 15,463 | 16,609 | 6,618 | 16,787 | 15,463 | 16,787 | 15,463 | 12,811 | 4,526 | 16,787 | 15,463 |

Note: 1) Model 1 refers to participants (1) and non-participants (2); Model 2 refers to the amount of times spent by participants; and Model 3 is the amount of time spent by all individuals in the sample

2) Figures in [] are standard errors, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Source: *Time Use Survey* for 2004 and 2009, Statistics Korea

We used the JMP decomposition technique to better understand how much of the mean changes in time spent on housework and child care can be attributed to the changes taken place in time spent by different time-use quantiles. For men, the mean changes in time use for housework and child care were for the most part due to the changes occurred in the top 25 percent of the time use distribution. The changes in question were regarded as due not to the effective of structural factors alone but to their interplay with non-structural factors.

Women in general were found to have reduced time they spent on housework, while the increase observed in time they spent on child care was attributable mostly to the upper 50 percent of time-use distribution. Overall, the decrease in time spent on housework was driven by and large by structural factors, and the increase in time spent on child care was due mostly to the effect of the interplay of structural and non-structural factors. Also, the effect of such interaction is found to have been larger on mothers in the higher quantiles than in the lower.

The Unconditional Quantile Regression method enabled us to compare the Korean case with the findings of a comparable study conducted in 2014 for French families (Champagne, C., A. Paihé, and A. Solaz, “25 ans de participation des hommes et des femmes au travail domestique: quel facteurs d’évolution?”)

Women reduced their time spent on housework and men increased theirs in Korea, compared to France where there have been downward trends in time spent on housework for both men and women across all time-use quantiles. Non-structural factors were responsible for the decrease in the amount of time men in France spent on housework, while non-structural factors were found to have driven in the increase in time Korean men spent on

housework.

Both Korean men and women increased their time spent on child care, and the increase was more prominent in the middle and upper quantiles than in the lower quantiles, a trend similar to one observed in France. For women in both Korea and France, the effect of non-structural factors was to increase in time spent on child care, while in cases where time spent on child care decreased, the main responsible factors were structural ones.

The fact that the increase in the amount of time spent by men on child care is attributable for the most part to non-structural factors indicates in a sense that there have been changes in men's perceptual attitudes in ways conducive to raising fertility rates. The finding that the negative effect of the structural factors on the amount of time women spent on child care has been more than offset by the positive effect of non-structural factors suggests that it is the psychological and emotional motives that are shaping Korean mothers' child care pattern. Meanwhile, "increase in educational attainment," one of the structural factors considered in this study, was found to countervail to an extent the negative effect some other structural factors—such demographic factors as parents' age and labor market participation—have on time spent on child care. At the same time, Korean parents' increased level of education was found to be the strongest effect on the decrease in the time they spent on housework.

4. Concluding thought

The findings of this study point to the need to encourage Korean men to increase their time use in child care and housework. This would require creating a more stable work environment (especially for low-income men, who in many cases have to spend too much time making ends meet for their families) and instituting programs to change public attitudes towards men's role in child care.

Also important is to come to a clear understanding of whether the increase in the amount of time spent on child care was a voluntary choice that enriched the emotional aspect of the family or an involuntary choice that resulted some unwanted increase in child care burden. The increase observed in time spent on child care suggests that public childcare support needs to be provided not only financially, but also in a way that helps Korean parents reduce their time spent on child care.