

Work Overload: Household Tasks and Employment of Japanese Couples¹

Noriko O. Tsuya, Larry L. Bumpass, Minja Kim Choe, and Ronald R. Rindfuss

Both employment and the performance of household and family tasks are essential elements of the joint household production of married couples. Given time constraints, these competing demands must be balanced. Such balancing can occur through role specialization and a strict division of labor between wives and husbands, or by some sharing of paid work and domestic tasks.

Like women in most other industrialized countries, Japanese women have increasingly been drawn into the paid labor force after World War II, and employment of women at peak reproductive ages is rising especially rapidly in recent years (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2010: 137). Furthermore, employment seems to have become an expected aspect of a wife's role among Japanese couples of reproductive ages, as indicated by a finding from an analysis of 2000 data that a large majority of not only wives but also husbands showed strong preferences for wives to be employed (Bumpass *et al.* 2010).

While the average time Japanese women spent on household tasks have been on a gradual decline in the past few decades as shown by the government's time use survey (Somusho Tokeikyoku 2006; Tsuya 2007), they still shoulder a lion's share of domestic responsibilities. The situation in Japan is, however, by no means unique. Regardless of demographic characteristics, employment statuses, and family situations, it is almost universal that women spend on the average significantly more hours on household tasks than do men (Gershuny 2000; United Nations 1991: 101–102, 1995: 132–133).

While we see general similarities between Japan and the West in women's employment and the performance of household tasks, there exist differences in men's employment and even larger differences in men's participation in domestic tasks. Responding at least in part to increases in women's employment, men's contribution to domestic roles has increased considerably in many Western countries (e.g., Bianchi *et al.* 2000; Fuwa 2004; Gershuny 2000; Gershuny and Robinson 1988; United Nations 1991, pp.101–102, 1995, pp.132–133). Although the absolute level and relative share of men's contributions vary depending on measurement criterion and the range of tasks defined as housework, similar trends are seen in many Western countries. For example, Gershuny (2000: 161–202) found a "gender convergence" in time allocation between housework and labor-market activities in each of the 20 Western countries he examined. Consequently,

¹ This extended abstract is in between a completed paper and a promise of a completed paper. While the paper is not finished, some of our planned analyses are already completed and displayed at the tables at the end of this abstract.

although the degree and pace of change differs across countries, the gender gap in household task allocation has narrowed substantially in Western countries.

Japan remains an outlier among post-industrial countries in that men's contributions to domestic tasks have in general remained low, in both absolute and relative terms. Furthermore, the addition of paid employment to women's heavy domestic roles does not seem to have been, to any notable degree, offset by increases in husbands' contributions to household tasks (Tsuya *et al.* 2005). Consequently, Japanese wives seem to have little choice but to juggle the demands of these competing roles, either by adding paid employment to their existing domestic responsibilities, or by reducing the time spent in housework, without much help from their husbands.

Low levels of domestic activities and share of Japanese husbands are thought to be due at least in part to long hours they spend in the labor market. Japanese men work on the average substantially more hours each week than do men in most Western Societies (Jacobs and Gerson 2004: 119–147; Tsuya *et al.* 2005). When men work long hours and return home very late, the amount of effort that might be allocated to household tasks becomes limited.

While unequal gender relations at home may have different meanings and implications in different sectors of the society, they are very likely among the foremost factors making marriage unappealing to Japanese women, both unmarried and married. The persistence of gender inequality at home, on one hand, and rapidly changing expectations toward gender roles and increasing economic opportunities, on the other, make the "package" associated with marriage particularly unattractive for many young Japanese women (Raymo and Ono 2007; Rindfuss 2004). It has also been argued that the double role of worker and homemaker reduces marital satisfaction for many wives (Meguro and Nishioka 2000). This difficulty in reconciling employment and domestic responsibilities likely discourages young women from marrying and wives from having a(nother) child. Men, also, may find the discrepancy between their expectations and those of potential spouses a cause for apprehension about marrying.

Substantial changes in marriage and childbearing behaviors are indeed underway in Japan in recent decades. Marriages have been markedly delayed and non-marriage is increasing. The proportion never-married among women age 25–29 increased from 18 percent in 1975 to 59 percent in 2005 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2010: 109). The proportion never-married among men aged 30–34 more than tripled from 14 percent in 1975 to 47 percent in 2005. The proportion never-married at age 50 also shows a sign of increase in recent years. While it was only around 2 percent in early postwar years, it increased to 7 percent for women and 16 percent for men in 2005, implying an increasing departure from the traditional pattern of universal marriage. With little childbearing outside marriage (the proportion of unmarried births has been around 1–2 percent since 1960), the increasing delay of marriage, in turn, has played a major role in driving Japan's fertility to below-replacement levels, reaching the "lowest-low" level of a

TFR of 1.3 per woman in the early 2000s (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2010: 50–51).

The persistent gender segregation of marital roles in the Japanese home, in the face of increasing women's employment, has in fact been suggested by existing studies and the government policy reports as a major factor in the dramatic demographic changes in the recent decades, such as increasing delay of marriage and non-marriage, rising divorce rates, and very low fertility (e.g., Naikakufu 2003; Meguro and Nishioka 2000; Yamaguchi 2004). Changes or the lack thereof in the gender balance between household tasks and employment may well be critical to the Japanese family and its family policies in the future.

Using data drawn from two national surveys on the family conducted in 2000 and 2009, this study examines how Japanese couples reconcile their domestic and labor-market responsibilities. The first decade of the 21st century—the period this study covers—is very important for studies of the Japanese family because new and dramatic socio-demographic and economic changes are occurring. Japan's population began to shrink in 2005 due largely to fertility declines to extremely low levels. Rising permanent non-marriage during this decade, which is one of the primary factors associated with the lowest-low fertility, signals an increasing separation from the centuries-long tradition of universal marriage (Kurosu, Tsuya and Hamano 1999). Moreover, and perhaps more importantly for studies of the work-family interface, the nature of the labor market has been going through fundamental changes. In an attempt to increase their competitiveness and profitability in the face of economic globalization, employers are increasingly moving away from lifetime employment, a long prevalent and distinguished feature of the Japanese labor market, resulting in rapid decreases in regular employment with job security and career prospects, replaced by the proliferation of various temporary employment (Igarashi 2009; Saito 2009).

In the context of these important changes in economy and family over this decade, we examine changes and stability in the gender allocation of household tasks. To what extent has the balance between household tasks and employment changed for husbands and wives, and in what context—demographic, socioeconomic, and household—are such shifts taking place? For example, are younger or more highly educated men more likely to have increased their domestic roles? Our analysis focuses on data on employment and household tasks for currently married men and women aged 20–49 and their spouses.

Specifically, this paper looks at time spent altogether across measures of three types of core household tasks including cooking and clean-up after meals, housecleaning and doing laundry, and grocery shopping. In parts of the paper, we look as well at the allocation of time to these particular task types. We examine how household task hours of wives and husbands differ by their employment hours and types (separately by gender and jointly for couples), and by their family and life-course characteristics as measured by age, education, age of youngest child, coresidence with the senior generation, and place of residence. Finally, we examine the extent to which patterns by family, life-course, and socioeconomic variables have changed over time.

Our measures include the actual amount of time spent on household tasks, the proportion of total household time (wives' plus husbands') performed by each spouse, and whether husbands perform *any* household tasks. Although Japanese husbands contribute on the average a small number of hours to household tasks, their crossing the symbolic gender barrier associated with performing tasks traditionally gender-typed as female may well be very important.

Data and Measures

This study uses two time-series national surveys on the family in Japan: the 2000 and 2009 National Survey on Family and Economic Conditions (NSFEC). The NSFEC is a national probability sample of men and women aged 20–49 and of all marital statuses. Using a stratified, two-stage probability sampling based on the 1995 population census tracts distributions, the 2000 survey obtained 2,447 usable responses. Based on the same probability sampling based on the 2005 census tracts distributions, the 2009 survey includes 3,112 respondents. This study focuses on currently married women and men aged 20–49 and their spouses. The 2000 survey included 2,443 such couples; the corresponding number for the 2009 survey is 1,665. Because younger individuals (age 20–39) were selected at twice the rate of those aged 40–49 in both surveys, and also because of its relatively low response rate among young never-married persons, especially young unmarried men, living in large metropolitan areas, sample weights are computed, adjusting different rates of responses by sex, age, and place of residence.

In both surveys, respondents were asked to provide reports for themselves and their spouses on objective information, including the status, hours and schedules of employment, time spent on each of the above-mentioned core items of housework, and such basic socio-demographic characteristics as age and education. Because the sampling frame and method are the same in both surveys, we pool the two datasets in multivariate analyses, including the year of survey as a variable. We examine the interaction of the year of survey and other characteristics to see if patterns of association have changed over time between the two surveys.

This paper focuses on two central dimensions of the gender division of labor: household tasks and employment. The analysis of household tasks looks at: (1) the actual number of hours spent per week on each and altogether of the three types of core household tasks by wives and husbands, (2) husbands' share in couples' combined household task hours, and (3) the proportion of husbands who do any housework. Time spent on household tasks was computed as the sum of hours spent on each of the core tasks by each spouse. In addition, to reduce the effects of outliers, we recoded hours exceeding the 98th percentile back to the level of the 98th percentile.

We examine the balance between household tasks and labor-market activities, using both a categorical and continuous variables of employment of wives and husbands. The

2000 and 2009 surveys both measured employment hours per week by an identical variable consisted of seven categories—zero, 1–15 hours, 16–34 hours, 35–41 hours, 41–49 hours, and 60 hours or more. Employment hours were estimated using the midpoint of each category, except for the categories of 35–41 hours and 60 hours and more per week. Values of 39 and 66 hours were assigned to these two latter categories respectively, based on data from the Japanese national wage structure surveys.² Since the 2009 survey also measured type of employment—employed as a regular employee, employed as a non-regular/temporary employee, self-employed, unemployed, and other—we also look at the relationship between work hours and types/statuses of employment.

To measure life-course and family constraint variables, our analysis includes wives'/husbands' age, age of youngest child, and coresidence with the senior generation. Age of either spouse is a categorical variable consisted of: less than 30, 30–34, 35–39, 40–44, and 45 or older. Because wives' age and husbands' age are highly correlated, we do not include both in the analysis. Age of youngest child is coded into four categories: under age 3, age 3–6, age 7–17, and no child under age 18. Coresidence with parents is indexed by a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not couples live with at least one parent or parent-in-law.

Our analysis also includes husbands' and wives' education because we hypothesize that the better educated are more likely to be in career-type jobs and subjected to the time demands that such jobs entail, and also because we expect that better educated men and women are more likely to be aware of and in agreement with the notion of gender equality. The education of each spouse is measured by a categorical variable: less than high school, high school, some college or equivalent, and four-year college or higher. The category of "some college or equivalent" includes junior college and two kinds of schools for advanced occupational training (*kōtō-senmon-gakko* and post-high-school *senshū-gakko*). We also include size of place of residence because couples' employment patterns are likely to be structured by the local labor market, and also because couples' housework patterns may differ by urban/rural residence. Residence is measured by a categorical variable: large metropolitan city, medium-size city, small city, and rural area. Finally, we include sex of respondent because husbands and wives possibly and likely differ in their reports of how much time their spouses spend on household tasks.

Results of a Preliminary Analysis

(1) Employment

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of the usual weekly employment hours of wives and husbands in 2000 and 2009. Not surprisingly, virtually all husbands are employed in

² We gratefully acknowledge that Professor Yoshio Okunishi of Hosei University provided us the information based on the micro-level data of the wage structure surveys.

both years under consideration. Husbands' primary activity is expected to be to work to support for their wife and children. Despite the continuing deflation since the 1990s (Johnsson 2005; Masters 2009) and the recent financial crisis in 2008 (Chari *et al.* 2008; Naudé 2009), the employment rate of married Japanese men in their prime working years appears to be largely unaffected by the prolonged economic downturn and the recent economic crisis.

<Table 1 about here>

While the mean number of hours of employed husbands changed little, the proportion of husbands working relatively short hours as a full-time worker (35–41 hours per week) decreased from 16 to 13 percent while the proportion of those working very long hours (49 hours or more) increased from 19 to 22 percent. Full-time (and most likely regularly) employed men at peak working ages may be influenced by the ongoing proliferation of non-regular employment driven by the economic slump, in the sense that those with regular employment are likely shouldering a heavier workload and working longer hours to make up for shorter work hours of non-regular employees.

Turning to wives' employment, we can see from the left panel of Table 1 that the employment rate stayed at around 62 percent during 2000–2009, and the number of work hours of employed wives declined very slightly from 33 to 32 hours per week. It is noteworthy that there has been so little change in employment patterns despite the prolonging of economic strains.

(2) Household Tasks and Combined Workload

The upper panel of Table 2 presents the mean hours per week that wives and husbands spent on household tasks and husbands' average share of couples' household task time in 2000 and 2009. We see modest, if any, changes in couples' household task hours: wives' average household task time decreased modestly from 29.0 hours to 27.6 per week while the corresponding hours for husbands increased slightly from 2.8 hours to 3.4 hours. As a result, husbands' share of household tasks increased moderately from 9.5 percent to 11.9 percent. Altogether, these changes are all for the direction toward more gender balance at home, but they are all very small.

The most notable change that we can see here is a sizable decline in the proportion of husbands who do not do any housework: approximately 30 percent to 22 percent. Putting this in a longer time scale, with the corresponding proportion in 1994 being 42 percent (Tsuya *et al.* 2005), Japanese husbands seem to be increasingly drawn into the domestic arena traditionally considered as female, crossing the symbolic gender barrier associated with performing household tasks. Overall, despite small increases in husbands' housework hours and their share of couples' housework hours, however, overwhelming gender imbalance in household task allocation still persists in the Japanese home.

<Table 2 about here>

When we turn to the average combined workload (household task time and employment time combined), however, a very different picture emerges. As shown in the lower panel of Table 2, when housework and labor-market hours are considered jointly, the clear gender inequality we saw in the division of household labor disappears, and the gender balance in combined workload becomes, albeit slightly, more favorable toward wives. Husbands' share of combined workload is 53 percent in 2000 and 54 percent in 2009.

The gender equality in these overall averages in combined workload nevertheless masks large gender differences when viewed from the employment hours of each spouse. As shown in the upper left panel of Table 3, while the combined workload of wives who do not work or work only a small number of hours is much less than that of their husbands, wives' combined workload increases dramatically as their employment hours go up. In both years the average combined workload of wives more than doubled (from 32 hours to 80 hours per week in 2009) when we compare full-time homemakers and wives who worked 49 or more hours a week in the labor market. This clearly indicates that the "second shift" of unpaid housework among full-time employed wives (Hochschild 1991) still persists in Japan.

<Table 3 about here>

Most important, however, is that, were we able to include time spent taking care of children, the "double shift" would likely become apparent over much, if not all, of the levels of wives' employment. For example, 61 percent of wives who were not employed have preschool children, compared to 31 percent among those employed full-time. Thus, although Japanese husbands and wives face an equally arduous combination of employment and household tasks, the image of gender equality in hours disappears when motherhood is added.

Husbands' combined workload also increases somewhat when their wives are working long hours in the labor market (49 hours or more per week in the upper right panel of Table 3). However, the level of the association between husbands' combined workload and wives' employment hours is much weaker, compared to the strong positive association between wives employment hours and their combined workload. Of course, the overwhelming share of husbands' combined workload is their employment time.

(3) Differentials in Couples' Household Task Hours by Their Employment Hours

We next look at differences by employment hours of each spouse in the average number of hours spent on household tasks by wives and husbands, husbands' relative share of couples' housework time, and the percentage of husbands doing no housework. As expected, there is a sharp reduction in wives' household task hours as their employment time increases, and

the pattern is largely unchanged during 2000–2009 (see the top panel of Table 4). Husbands' housework hours increase when their wives are employed full-time (35 hours or more per week) although the absolute level of increase remains small. Consequently, the relative share of husbands increases notably when wives are employed full-time.

In both years, husbands were least likely to help with housework when the wife was employed part-time. In 2009 there is a clear decline in the proportion not helping as wives' hours of employment increase. This suggests that husbands do respond, albeit at low levels, by taking on more household tasks as their wives' work obligations outside the home increase.

<Table 4 about here>

Turning to differentials by husbands' employment hours (see the bottom panel of Table 4), we can see that wives' household task hours increase as their husbands work longer hours in the labor market, and this positive association became stronger during the 2000s. Not surprisingly, husbands' contributions to household tasks decline in both years as his employment hours increase over 35–41 hours. Further, husbands' share in couple's total household task hours declines almost linearly with their employment hours in both years, owing largely to the fact that wives' housework hours increase sharply in accordance with increases in their husbands' employment hours. Finally, in both years the percentage of husbands who do not perform any housework is notably higher among men who work less than 35 hours per week. This suggests that, although they are a small minority among Japanese husbands at peak working ages, husbands who were not working or worked only a small number of hours also did not contribute much, if any, to domestic tasks.

(4) Changes in Husbands' Housework by Demographic and Family Characteristics

We next examine changes in the patterns of husbands' participation in housework by selected demographic and family characteristics—such as wives' age, spouses' education, age of youngest child, coresidence with parents/parents-in-law, and spouses' income—by comparing the two independent cross-sections for 2000 and 2009, and also by measuring change within the panel followed over this period. In the aggregate figures, we find clear cohort effects as older cohorts with lower levels of housework participation aged out of the original 20–49 sample and were replaced in 2009 by cohorts that were too young to have been represented in 2000 (data not shown here). Over this period, we also find increases in the panel data for both hours that husbands spent in household tasks and in the percent of husbands doing any housework appearing in all categories of the variables examined.

Analysis is currently underway on a range of other characteristics and we only note here a couple of findings of interest. Expanding on the results shown in Table 4, in both the successive cross-sections and the panel data, the greatest increase in husbands' household task hours occurred among those with wives employed full-time.

Surprisingly, in the panel data we find that the proportion of husbands helping out (i.e., those doing any housework) did not increase after they became a parent for the first time over the interval between surveys. Total hours of husbands' participation in housework did increase, but less than in other categories of this comparison. In particular, the largest increase in housework hours was among husbands without children under age 18 in both years.

On the other hand, consistent with our expectations, both the likelihood of husbands' participation in housework and the number of hours contributed increased most among couples who lived with parents in 2000 but not in 2009, compared to those continued to live with parents, or lived apart from parents in both years.

Since our data were collected in terms of three types of household tasks, we are able to examine which tasks husbands are engaging in, and for which the increases have occurred. While there are differences between husbands' and wives' reports with respect to levels, the patterns are very similar in most cases (and differences are of substantive interest where they are found). Grocery shopping is perhaps the least gender-typed task of the three measured, and husbands are most likely to help with grocery shopping. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that fully a third of wives report that their husbands help with cleaning and laundry, and with cooking and cleaning. Further, husbands' contributions to these tasks increased much more with respect to these tasks than did their role in grocery shopping.

We plan to conduct additional analyses, including some multivariate analyses to account for the extent to which patterns of household task hours and husbands' participation in housework by family, life-course, and socioeconomic variables have changed over time. We are confident that we will be able to complete the paper by the end of February 2011.

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Table 1. Percentage Distribution on Usual Employment Hours per Week of
Currently Married Women and Men Aged 20-49 and Their Spouses:
Japan, 2000 and 2009

Hours per week	Wives		Husbands	
	2000	2009	2000	2009
Not employed	37.9	38.5	1.4	1.5
Employed				
15 or less	8.8	9.4	2.6	2.6
16-34	20.6	21.8	1.9	2.0
35-41	16.2	14.6	16.2	13.1
42-48	10.1	10.0	30.4	29.3
49-59	4.4	4.5	28.4	29.6
60 or more	2.0	1.3	19.2	21.9
Mean work hours of those employed	33.1	32.0	49.9	50.2
(Number of cases)	(2,376)	(1,641)	(2,417)	(1,652)

Notes: Percentages are weighted and the numbers of cases are unweighted for both years.

Table 2. Mean Hours per Week Spent by Wives and Husbands on Household Tasks and Their Average Combined Workload (Hours on Household Tasks and Employment Combined): Japan, 2000 and 2009

	2000		2009	
	Mean	(N)	Mean	(N)
Household task hours ^a				
Wives' hours per week	29.0	(2,417)	27.6	(1,648)
Husbands' hours per week	2.8	(2,384)	3.4	(1,643)
Husbands' share (%)	9.5	(2,366)	11.9	(1,634)
% of husbands with no housework	30.4	(2,384)	22.0	(1,665)
Combined workload ^b				
Wives' hours per week	49.6	(2,354)	47.3	(1,633)
Husbands' hours per week	52.1	(2,366)	52.9	(1,627)
Husbands' share (%)	52.6	(2,297)	54.0	(1,665)

Notes: Mean hours and percentages are weighted and the numbers of cases are unweighted for both years.

a--The hours spent on household tasks were computed by adding the time devoted to cleaning house, doing laundry, cooking, cleaning after meals, and grocery shopping. Household task time excludes time spent on childcare.

b--Combined workload was computed by adding the number of hours spent on household tasks and those on employment.

Table 3. Average Combined Workload (Mean Hours Spent on Employment and Housework Combined) per Week of Wives and Husbands by Their Weekly Employment Hours: Japan 2000 and 2009

Hours per week	Wives		Husbands	
	2000	2009	2000	2009
Wives' employment hours				
0 (not working)	33.6	31.8	52.9	52.4
1–15	37.8	34.8	46.2	49.9
16–34	54.0	52.3	51.9	52.9
35–41	63.3	61.5	50.1	51.7
42–48	68.1	67.8	53.3	55.1
49 or more	81.1	79.9	62.9	59.7
Husbands' employment hours				
Less than 35	39.6	36.9	14.6	14.7
35–41	49.1	46.0	42.2	43.0
42–48	49.6	47.0	48.8	48.5
49–59	49.6	49.0	57.8	57.5
60 or more	52.3	48.9	68.5	69.0

Notes: Averages are weighted.

Table 4. Mean Hours per Week Spent by Wives and Husbands on Household Tasks, Husbands' Average Share (%) of Couples' Household Task Time, and Percentage of Husbands Who Do No Household Tasks, by Employment Hours of Each Spouse: Japan, 2000 and 2009

Characteristics	Wives' task hours		Husbands' task hours		Husbands' share in couples' task hours		% of husbands doing no housework	
	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009	2000	2009
Wives work hours per week								
0 (not working)	33.7	31.8	2.8	2.9	7.8	9.6	29.3	22.1
1–15	29.8	26.8	2.4	2.9	7.9	9.8	36.3	28.3
16–34	29.0	27.3	2.4	3.2	7.9	10.8	35.4	23.3
35–41	24.3	22.5	3.0	4.0	11.1	15.2	28.0	22.6
42–48	22.1	22.8	3.4	5.3	13.9	18.3	24.8	11.9
49 or more	22.7	23.2	4.2	4.1	16.1	16.1	24.3	23.7
Husbands' work hours per week								
Less than 35	26.9	21.9	3.1	3.4	10.9	16.0	34.6	31.1
35–41	28.5	26.4	3.2	4.0	10.7	13.5	28.0	23.8
42–48	28.2	27.5	2.8	3.5	9.7	12.3	29.8	18.5
49–59	29.4	28.1	2.8	3.5	9.4	11.5	27.9	21.2
60 or more	30.6	29.2	2.5	3.0	8.0	10.0	34.6	24.1
(Number of cases)	(2,417)	(1,648)	(2,384)	(1,648)	(2,366)	(1,634)	(2,366)	(1,643)

Notes: Means are weighted for 2000 and the numbers of cases are unweighted for both years.

a--Includes junior college, advanced professional school, and post-high-school professional training school.