The Division of Household Labor, Gender Attitudes, and Marital Happiness: Evidence from Japan 2000-2009

Emi Tamaki, Ronald R. Rindfuss, Minja Kim Choe, Noriko O. Tsuya, Larry L. Bumpass, and Martin Piotrowski

Abstract. This paper aims to examine the relationship between the division of household labor and marital happiness using two repeated cross-sectional data from Japan (NSFEC 2000 and 2009). In particular, we explore how attitudes toward gender and family relations are associated with the household division of labor and marital happiness. Preliminary results from the 2009 data suggest that husbands' share of household work is positively related to wives' marital happiness but not to husbands', and that the positive association between husbands' contribution to housework and marital happiness is most pronounced among wives with traditional gender attitudes.

Two competing explanations have been put forward to explain the association between the division of labor and marital quality. A specialization hypothesis explains that the marital quality is higher when husbands and wives engage in complementary family roles, because specialization, where wives provide domestic labor and husbands provide income, brings efficiency, cooperation, and less competition in marriage (Becker 1981; Schoen et al. 2006; Amato et al. 2003). An egalitarian hypothesis, on the other hand, explains that marital quality improves when husbands and wives occupy similar roles, because similar responsibilities and experiences lead to better communication, mutual understanding, and satisfaction in marriage (Wilcox and Nock 2006; Coltrane 2000).

This paper argues that the relationship between housework arrangements and marital quality depends on preferences. Specifically, we argue that the association between the division of household labor and marital happiness may depend on individuals' gender attitudes (Figure 1). Spouses with traditional family attitudes, for example, may not see a problem with an unequal division of housework, while couples with egalitarian preferences may be more susceptible to an unbalanced division of housework and more likely to be unsatisfied with their marriage. Using Japan as a case, we examine the relationship among gender attitudes, division of household tasks, and marital happiness.

Japan has undergone a tremendous demographic shift in recent decades. Women's educational level and employment have increased, the total fertility rate has declined to the point of 1.26 in 2005, and attitudes toward gender and family relations have become more egalitarian (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2012; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2012; Cabinet Office 2011; National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2005). Yet,

compared to the United States and other European countries, Japan still maintains traditional gender relations and ideology. A large proportion of Japanese women exit labor force after marriage and childbearing (Brinton 2001). About 40% of Japanese men and women agreed that the husband should be the breadwinner and the wife should stay at home (Cabinet Office 2004). This number is strikingly high compared to the United States (17%), Germany (20%), and Sweden (12%). In society where a traditional family preference and behaviors are still prevalent, the specialization model may explain the relationship between the division of house work and marital happiness. At the same time, however, we may find evidence of the egalitarian hypothesis due to the recent change toward non-traditional gender and family beliefs. Thus, Japan provides an important ground for testing the two competing hypotheses regarding division of household labor and marital satisfaction.

Data come from National Surveys on Family and Economic Conditions (NSFEC), two repeated cross-sectional surveys conducted in 2000 and 2009. The NSFEC consists of nationally representative sample of Japanese men and women aged 20 to 49. The total sample size is 4,482 in 2000 and 3,112 in 2009. For our analysis, we use only those who are currently-married. Since attitudes, behaviors, and happiness are all interrelated, our aim in this paper is to examine the associations among key variables, instead of testing the causality.

To measure marital happiness, respondents were asked "How satisfied are you with your marriage?". Response categories include *very satisfied*, *somewhat satisfied*, *so-so*, *somewhat dissatisfied*, and *very dissatisfied*. Those who are very or somewhat satisfied are coded as 1, while those who answered very satisfied, somewhat satisfied or so-so are coded as 0. The division of household labor is measured by the percentage of husband's weekly hours spent on cleaning, cooking, and grocery shopping. A gender attitude scale was created using the following questions: being housewife is as fulfilling as working for income, men have priority over women for jobs when jobs are scarce, a wife should work only when extra income is needed, and it is better for a man to earn living and for a woman to take care of home. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement to each statement by choosing either *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *uncertain*, *somewhat disagree*, or *disagree*. Other theoretically relevant variables are also included such as the presence of a child (children) under age 18, husband's and wife's own income, age, and education.

Results from the 2009 data

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of variables used in the analysis, stratified by gender. In Table 2, binary logistic regressions were run using all samples, in order to assess the general relationship between marital happiness and various demographic variables in addition to division of household labor

and gender attitudes.   In Table 3, we divided the sample into men and women and ran the same model as in Table 2. While husband's contribution to housework is positively related to happiness for wives, the relationship is not significant for husbands.   The results also show that the presence of a young child lowers marital satisfaction for wives but not for husbands.   Furthermore, for wives, husband's income is positively associated with marital happiness but their own income has a negative impact on happiness.   Table 4 further divided the female sample by the gender attitude.   Results show that the positive association between husband's share of household labor and marital happiness is most pronounced among wives with most traditional views.

The same analysis will be conducted with data in 2000 and we will compare the results to assess the change and continuity over the 9 year period.
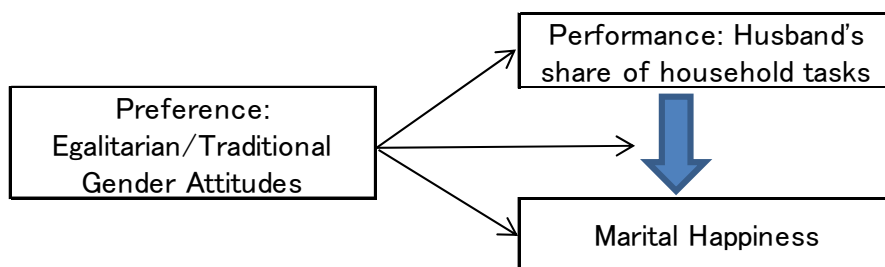
Figure 1. Conceptual model

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables used in the analysis, stratified by gender (weighted percentage distributions and unweighted n)

	Male (n=726)		Female (n=939)	
	%	n	%	n
Marital happiness				
Very dissatisfied	1	5	3	23
Somewhat dissatisfied	2	12	6	56
So-so	34	233	49	447
Somewhat Satisfied	31	222	24	231
Very Satisfied	33	243	17	172
Husband's share of hhld task				
<5%	33	230	38	344
5 - 15%	35	242	34	318
15 - 100%	32	242	27	258
Gender attitude				
Most traditional	34	247	22	209
Middle	45	331	40	374
Least traditional	20	146	38	351
Age				
20-24	2	18	2	19
25-29	7	62	9	97
30-24	17	156	19	226
35-39	27	261	27	322
40-44	24	121	21	128
45-49	22	108	22	147
Husband's income				
less than 4mil yen	35	271	39	370
4mil - 6mil	35	261	31	285
6mil - 8mil	19	118	19	160
8 mil yen or more	11	63	11	85
Wife's income				
no income	36	257	32	320
0 - less than 1mil	30	214	30	264
1mil - 4mil	27	189	31	266
4mil yen or more	7	54	8	66
Presence of a child under 18	79	577	78	742

Table 2. Binary logistic regression predicting marital happiness (1=very/somewhat satisfied, 0=so-so, somewhat/very dissatisfied)

		Model 1		Model 2	
		OR	p	OR	p
Male		2.66	***	2.63	***
Age	20-24	Ref		Ref	
	25-29	1.14		1.13	
	30-24	0.90		0.89	
	35-39	0.93		0.91	
	40-44	0.64		0.64	
	45-49	0.39	*	0.39	*
Child under 18		0.79	**	0.79	**
Husband's income		1.36	***	1.37	***
Wife's income		0.87	*	0.88	*
Husband's share of hhld task					
	<5%	Ref		Ref	
	5 - 15%	1.37	*	1.37	*
	15 - 100%	1.76	***	1.76	***
Gender attitude					
Most traditional				Ref	
Middle				0.84	
Least traditional				0.87	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (two-tailed test)

Table 3. Binary logistic regression predicting marital happiness (1=very/somewhat satisfied, 0=so-so, somewhat/very dissatisfied), by gender

	Male (n=726)		Female (n=939)	
	OR	p	OR	p
Husband's share of hhld task				
<5%	Ref		Ref	
5 - 15%	1.19		1.50	*
15 - 100%	1.26		2.22	***
Gender attitude				
Most traditional	Ref		Ref	
Middle	0.72		0.97	
Least traditional	1.09		0.81	
Child under 18	0.81		0.78	*
Husband's income	1.09		1.59	***
Wife's income	0.96		0.83	*
Education				
Less than HS				
HS graduate	1.42		1.67	
Vocational school	2.06		1.77	
College +	2.50	*	2.14	
Age 20-24	Ref		Ref	
25-29	1.26		1.04	
30-24	1.10		0.79	
35-39	1.02		0.81	
40-44	0.88		0.49	
45-49	0.42		0.37	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (two-tailed test)

Table 4. Binary logistic regression predicting wives' marital happiness (1=very/somewhat satisfied, 0=so-so and somewhat/very dissatisfied), by gender attitudes

	Most traditional (n=192)		Middle (n=343)		Least traditional (n=321)	
	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p
Husband's share of hhld task						
<5%	Ref		Ref		Ref	
5 - 15%	2.27	*	1.51		1.14	
15 - 100%	4.91	***	2.34	**	1.29	
Child under 18	0.63		0.90		0.76	
Husband's income	1.44		1.40	*	2.09	***
Wife's income	0.70		0.71	*	1.12	
Education						
Less than HS	Ref		Ref		Ref	
HS graduate	4.11		1.20		1.00	
Vocational school	3.64		1.16		1.52	
College +	6.55	*	1.79		1.08	
Age 20-24	Ref		Ref		Ref	
25-29	0.28		2.41		0.97	
30-24	0.34		2.46		0.37	
35-39	0.38		2.15		0.44	
40-44	0.22		1.45		0.21	
45-49	0.10		1.36		0.14	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (two-tailed test)