

Chapter 4 Families and households

Topic 1 Couples

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Activity: Research

Are couples becoming more equal?

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- Identify patterns of domestic division of labour from your own research.
- Draw conclusions about the impact of women's paid work on the division of labour.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of using questionnaires to study the domestic division of labour.

1. Using pages 167-172 of your textbook, as a whole class, design a questionnaire to investigate the extent of symmetry in families today. You need to consider the impact of paid work on the amount of housework and childcare carried out by couples. To simplify this you need to ask women to fill in your questionnaire but it is important that you ask them about their work e.g. do they work full-time, part-time or not at all. The women you ask must be living with a male partner.

You need to ask the women questions about:

- a. How much time they spend on housework activities
 - b. How much time their partners spend on the same activities
 - c. How much time they spend on childcare activities
 - d. How much time their partners spend on the same activities
 - e. What leisure activities they undertake; how much time they spend on these, and how this compares with their partners.
2. Distribute the questionnaire to a range of women (this may include your mothers). As a class you need to get at least 30 responses.
 3. Combine the data for the whole class. You will need to sort the questionnaires into the following groups:
 - a. women who work full-time
 - b. women who work part-time
 - c. women who do not work

For each group calculate the average amount of time that women spend on the tasks you have asked about. Also calculate the total amount of time the women in each group spend on: (a) housework tasks; (b) childcare tasks; (c) leisure.

4. From your class results, what conclusions can you draw about the impact of paid work on the domestic division of labour between men and women?
5. How do your conclusions compare with the research findings described in this topic? Do they support the 'March of Progress' view or the feminist view? Give your reasons.
6. Did you encounter any problems carrying out your research?
7. One problem of questionnaires is their inflexibility: once you have decided what questions to ask, you cannot add others. What factors that might affect the domestic division of labour, apart from women's employment status, would be worth asking about?