Is it fair to share? Perceptions of fairness in the division of housework among couples in 22 countries

Ida Öun

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between the actual division of housework and men’s and women’s perceived fairness in this regard. The central question is how the actual sharing of housework influences the perceptions of fairness in the division of housework. It is hypothesized that the perceptions of fairness differ between policy models. In countries where gender equality has been more present on the political agenda and dual earner policies have been introduced, people are expected to be more susceptible to an unfair sharing of housework. By analysing the relationship between actual division of housework and perceptions of fairness in household work for 22 countries, representing different family policy models, the study takes on a comparative perspective with the purpose of analysing the normative impact of policy. The analysis draws on data from the 2002 round of the International Social Survey Programme on family and changing gender roles. The results show that in countries that have promoted gender equality through the introduction of policies with an aim to promote dual roles in work and family, both women and men are more sensitive to an unfair division of household labour. The difference between policy models is greater among men than among women, indicating that a politicization of the dual-earner family is more important for men’s equity perceptions than women’s.

Key words: household work, division of labour, fairness, family policy, gender