

Using Data to Address the Unpaid Work Burden: A Case Study of Finland

Executive Summary

Finland is a global leader in promoting the equal sharing of unpaid work. For the past thirty years, researchers and policymakers in Finland have been using data from Time Use Surveys (TUS) to understand the gendered division of unpaid work, and to develop a wide range of family policies aimed at reducing inequalities in women's economic and social participation, including **supporting parental leave and childcare; valuing domestic services; and promoting rural women's employment.** TUS data has been a key source of evidence for advocates, researchers, and policymakers in shaping and evaluating the impact of these family policies.

Statistics Finland has shown that involving government agencies throughout the data collection process increases the likelihood of applying TUS data for decision-making.

Background

Time is a precious resource. It can be devoted to market work, (unpaid) work within the household, child or elder care, or personal leisure. Around the world, women continue to spend more hours in unpaid childcare and housework than men. The disproportionate burden of unpaid work can prevent women from entering full-time work, remaining in the labor market after having children, and progressing in their careers, which can limit earnings and pension entitlements. In many developed economies, women spend more total time on paid and unpaid work than men which creates added health pressures and takes away from possible leisure enjoyment.

Understanding the dynamics of how families balance work and domestic responsibilities is crucial for policymakers. They need access to meaningful

indicators that reflect the daily reality in order to design effective social policies in areas like childcare, parental leave, and workplace conditions. Failing to measure the contribution of unpaid work discounts women's role in the economy and society, and can lead to policies that discriminate against women, making it difficult for them to participate equally in society. The invisibility of unpaid work also underestimates a country's wealth production.

Finland has long been committed to social and gender equality. Beginning in 1979 and repeated approximately every ten years, Statistics Finland has measured how people spend their time throughout the country. When it became apparent that there were disparities between how men and women were using their time for domestic work, policymakers and researchers began developing policies and programs to balance the load.

The Data

Time Use Survey (TUS) data from 1987/88 (the first full year of data collection), revealed women carried 63% of the unpaid domestic care burden in Finland. Mothers of young children aged 0-6 carried an even higher share (69%), and spent an average of two hours 14 minutes a day on childcare as their main activity, while fathers spent an average of 45 minutes per day on childcare.

The TUS data also revealed major inequalities regarding women's economic and social participation in rural areas. Rural women had much longer daily and weekly total workloads compared to other occupational groups, spending ten hours more per week on unpaid domestic work than their counterparts. Rural women also spent less time socializing with friends and spent fewer hours in paid employment. The data painted a picture of rural isolation and exclusion from economic and cultural life.

FAMILY POLICIES IN FINLAND

The family policies currently in effect in Finland resulted from a series of discussions and negotiations over time by many different interest groups. In the 1970s, a broad social movement supporting women's employment emerged which advocated for increased access to child care, sharing childcare responsibilities within the family, and support for parental leave.

Key policy developments included:

1978: Fathers are given the right to take paternity leave subject to the mother's approval

1985: Maternity allowance is renamed maternity, paternity, and parental allowance

1990: Parents of children under the age of three are given the right for day care and child home care allowance

1991: Fathers are given the right to take paternity leave during the maternity or parental allowance period

1996: Parents of children under school age are given the right for day care

2001: Tax reduction for domestic costs is introduced

2004: Veto Program is introduced to improve work retention and conditions, leading to increase in maternity and paternity allowances

2013: The number of days of leave reserved exclusively for the father is raised to 54 working days

Data Use

TUS data has provided a rich source of evidence for advocates, researchers, and policymakers throughout public debates on family policy in Finland. This data has informed three policy areas targeting equality and women's unpaid work burden: supporting parental leave and childcare; valuing domestic services; and promoting rural women's employment.

Based on the findings from Time Use Surveys, the government of Finland recognized that special

measures were needed to reduce inequalities in unpaid work between men and women and between underrepresented groups of women in Finnish Society.

PARENTAL LEAVE AND CHILDCARE POLICIES

TUS data has been a key source for informing and revising Finland's comprehensive package of family policies including paid paternity leave for fathers, father-specific reservations of parental leave ('father bonus'), subsidized childcare, and flexible work arrangements.

Propelled by an active social movement supporting women's employment and equality, a spate of family policies were introduced between 1980-00s including a national child home care allowance system in 1990, and extensions to paternity leave in 2007 and 2013.

Analysis of 1999/00 TUS data by Piekkola and Ruuskanen found the unpaid work gap was greatest for younger women, and that only 25% of children under three years were in outside care (compared to 50% in Sweden). Influenced by these findings, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health introduced the 'Veto Program' (2003-2007) to improve workplace retention, including for mothers returning to work from maternity leave. Reforms to laws on parental allowances and compensation for employers were introduced in 2007 under the Veto Program. The maternity allowance went up from 70% to 90% of pay for the first 56 days, and the parental allowance rose to 75% of one's salary for the first 30 working days to encourage more fathers to take up leave.

VALUING DOMESTIC SERVICES

TUS data has also been used to calculate the value of unpaid work and evaluate interventions to decrease (predominantly women's) unpaid work burden.

In 2001, the Finnish Taxation Agency introduced a tax deduction for domestic costs like house cleaning, laundry, and child care to help decrease the unpaid work burden. Evaluations of the tax system by researchers using 2009/10 TUS data found positive impacts both on women's employment, and on the development of a new market for domestic services.

TUS data was used by the National Consumer Research Centre (NCRC) together with Statistics Finland to calculate the dollar value of unpaid work in

households, known as 'household satellite accounts'. In Finland, household satellite accounts have been compiled for 2001, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2016. Based on TUS data inputs, the NCRC has been able to estimate that Finland's gross domestic product (GDP) would be 40% higher if all forms of household production were included.

RURAL WOMEN EMPLOYMENT SCHEME

In 1990, the Ministry of Interior used data from the first two Time Use Surveys to conduct a special analysis of everyday life in rural and urban areas as part of a Rural Advancement Project. The report found that women's gainful employment in rural areas had decreased from 1979, while rural women spent less time socializing with friends than in urban areas.

Based on the report's recommendations, the Ministries of Interior and Agriculture and Forestry started a program to create new work opportunities for rural women. The Women's Working Group for Rural Development was established to provide training and funding for women's entrepreneurship.

DATA COLLECTION

Conducting a Time Use Survey requires asking individuals to record the time devoted to various activities in ten minute intervals over the course of 24 hours. Each activity, such as sleeping, washing, food preparation, and childcare is recorded in a diary and given a different code by Statistics Finland to help with analysis. This allows them to make comparisons between age, gender, and location (urban vs. rural) of households.

The first TUS relating to the whole year was conducted by Statistics Finland in 1987/88, and the latest was conducted in 2009/10. During the most recent round, 3,795 persons kept a time use diary covering a total 7,480 survey days. The two latest TUS have followed uniform European guidelines, which allows for cross-country comparison.

Statistics Finland use a range of channels and outputs to communicate findings from the TUS. Basic information about the survey, analysis of results, and methodology are made available on their website. Thirteen tables of historic survey

data are available online for users to download and explore the data for themselves. Statistics Finland also produces thematic reports utilizing TUS and other sources of data, e.g on gender equality.

The Policy Impact

Over the past three decades, Finland has witnessed shifts in gender equality and the unpaid work burden. Since 1987/88, the time spent on domestic work by women has decreased across all stages of the family cycle (from 63 to 59% in 2009/10). By comparison, men have increased the hours spent on childcare, and the time spent on housework (Figure 1).

Men still do more paid work and have more free time than women, although men's overall time in employment decreased with the economic downturn in the 2000s. Women's time in gainful employment has also decreased since 1987/88, but at a lower rate (Figure 2). Reasons for shortened working hours are also related to part-time work becoming more common for both men and women. Significantly, the difference between men and women in the amount of gainful employment diminished among wage and salary earners.

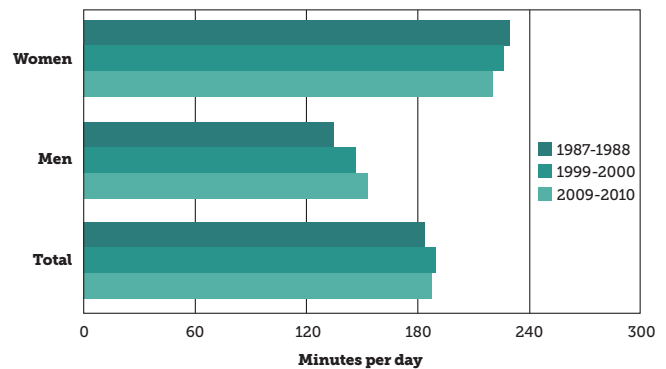


Figure 1. Time used for domestic work by persons aged ten or over by sex in 1987 to 1988, 1999 to 2000 and 2009 to 2010, minutes per day

Source: Statistics Finland. Time Use Survey

Time spent on domestic work has also been reduced by purchasing services or access to family or neighborly help. In 2009/10 one-half of respondents received help in household work, while 27% purchased domestic work-related services for their household. The most typical area in which help was received was childcare (12%).

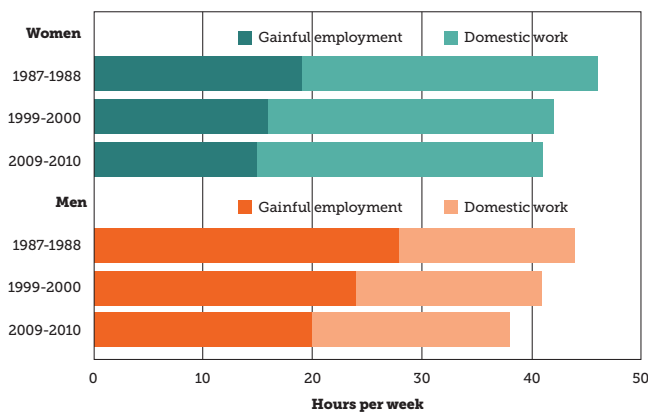


Figure 2. Total hours worked by women and men aged ten or over in 1987 to 1988, 1999 to 2000 and 2009 to 2010, hours per week

Source: Statistics Finland. Time Use Survey

A number of reasons help to explain this progress in closing the unpaid work gap, including evolving gender norms, introduction of government policies, and upturns or downturns within the economy. Although not directly responsible for these shifts, TUS data made patterns in gender inequality visible (e.g. plight of rural women). Moreover, TUS data has been used by a wide range of actors to develop policy and programmatic responses e.g. Veto Program; to monitor performance of policies, e.g. impact of tax reduction for domestic services; and to advocate for greater opportunities and resources, e.g. rural women’s advancement project.

Thanks to the report on rural life utilizing TUS data, which received plenty of media publicity, the situation of rural women in Finland became more widely known. The Women’s Working Group for Rural Development established new organizations, including cooperatives and resource centers, to support marketing of products and services by rural women.

Enabling Conditions

Several factors contributed to the use of the TUS data in Finland:

- **Sponsorship by data user agencies:** Multiple government agencies including education, environment, transport, and communications, and the Social Insurance Institute fund the TUS, and serve as expert advisors to shape the questions. Their involvement throughout the process helps make the data useful for decision making.

- **Consideration of different user needs:** Statistics Finland invests time in presenting TUS results in different formats, e.g. summary reports, articles, press releases, to reach a wide range of audiences. They also provide different levels of access to the microdata to those who might use it (e.g., funding agencies, academics), while protecting privacy.
- **Harmonization of approach:** Following the Eurostat guidelines allows for longitudinal and international comparisons which helps to benchmark and monitor progress over time. Representatives from Statistics Finland have actively contributed to international guidelines and microdata harmonizing based on their experience running TUS.
- **Support capacity for use:** Statistics Finland conducts capacity building activities to support data uptake, including training funding agencies and academics in the microdata, and teaching university courses for Masters students.

Challenges & Next Steps

While there has been progress in reducing the unpaid work share between men and women in Finland, there is still a long way to go. Compared to other Nordic countries there is a relatively low uptake of parental leave by fathers. Fathers’ uptake of parental leave has been found to be important in improving fathers’ commitment to childcare and reducing women’s unpaid work burden. Further evaluation of parental policies using TUS data, along with education and public awareness campaigns like the “Visible Fathers” initiative, are needed to support further changes in attitudes and behavior.

Time Use Surveys are an expensive and time-consuming exercise and as a result are conducted infrequently. However, more frequent production of data on time use is needed for certain types of analysis, for example for use in the household satellite accounts. In 2010, Statistics Finland developed a “light” diary to test if results were comparable with those of the fullscale diary. They found lower response rates and noticeable differences in time recorded for childcare and home maintenance. The planned use of web-based questionnaires should help to improve the process, quality, and frequency of data collection.

At the time of writing, preparations are underway for the next TUS taking place in 2020/21. The methodology will stay the same (following Eurostat guidelines), although online diaries will replace paper diaries for respondents below the age of 75. Results will be used to evaluate the impact of recent family policies and identify adjustments e.g. extending paid parental leave, and to understand the influence of social media on time use. It is also hoped that standardized TUS data can be used to measure progress in women's equality and compare household satellite accounts between countries.

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