Gender in Families: A Comparison of the Gendered Division of Child care in Rural and Urban China

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Background

Studies in the U.S. literature have documented that contemporary families have become increasingly egalitarian, as indicated by mothers' growing full-time labor force participation and fathers' growing involvement with housework, including child care. Although the gendered division of child care in the family is well documented in Western studies, less research has been done in China. Have the economic reforms in China increased gender equality in the division of child care as women have benefitted from increased bargaining power inside the household? Or, has the division of child care become even more unequal as women are being pushed out of labor force and are returning home? I intend to explore the pattern of the gendered division of child care in the context of China, a communist country that is undergoing a dramatic social-economic transition.

Objectives

The main research objectives are (1) to determine how child care time is divided differently between husband and wife in urban and rural sectors, and (2) to determine how this division is influenced by factors such as one's own or spouse's employment status, educational achievement, and earnings.

Methods

Data and sample selection:

I used the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS), an ongoing international collaborative project between the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine in Beijing. This research used four waves (2004, 2006, 2009 and 2011) of data because the questions asked about time allocation before 2000 are different from those used after 2004. Omitting observations with missing information, a total number of 397 households (397 wives and 397 husbands) were included in the sample, with 274 from rural sectors and 123 from urban sectors (See Table 1).

Instruments and Recoded Measurements:

Child care time; Household registration; Full time job status; Education and relative education; Personal income and relative income; Gender; Age; and other demographic characteristics.

Results

As expected, in both urban and rural areas, wives generally spent more hours with children than husbands. Compared to rural parents, urban men and women spent more time with their children (15.7 and 27.4, respectively), and the ratio of wife's child care time to husband's child care time was smaller in the urban sector than in the rural sector.

Table 4 Linear regression of the gendered division of child care with major independent variables in the rural sector

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Wife's fulltime job status	-1.857*	0.761								
Husband's fulltime job status	1.143	0.808								
Wife's education years			-0.103	0.161						
Husband's education years			0.040	0.148						
Positive women					-0.066	0.343				
Positive men					-0.095	0.294				
Same education					0.995	1.257				
Wife's log-income							-0.711	0.624		
Husband's log-income							0.373	0.525		
Wife's relative log-income									0.528	0.742
Husband's relative log-income									1.668**	0.844
Same relative log-income									-0.45	1.344
Constant	3.78***	0.661	4.966***	1.322	4.109***	1.098	5.532**	2.016	3.820***	0.533
R^2	0.028		0.02		0.01		0.005		0.017	
ANOVA Tests	3.135**		0.214		0.897		0.652		1.57	

Table 5 Linear regression of the gendered division of child care with major independent variables in the urban sector

Predictor	Model 2		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Wife's fulltime job status	-1.429	1.532								
Husband's fulltime job status	3.116*	1.532								
Wife's education years			0.008	0.188						
Husband's education years			-0.011	0.193						
Positive women					-0.156	0.299				
Positive men					-0.222	0.394				
Same education					-1.495	1.396				
Wife's log-income							-0.117	0.889		
Husband's log-income							-2.041*	1.179		
Wife's relative log-income									0.244	2.445
Husband's relative log-income									-.266	1.003
Same relative log-income									2.712*	1.558
Constant	2.248	1.416	3.814	2.393	4.821***	1.209	13.239**	4.675	3.501***	0.612
R^2	0.034		0.001		0.01		0.019		0.027	
ANOVA Tests	2.069		0.002		0.396		2.156		1.122	

According to the Regression model, I found that wife's fulltime job status had a significant negative effect on the ratio of wives' child care time to husbands' child care time in rural sectors but not in urban sectors.

Second, in the rural sector, I found that the greater husbands' relative contribution to the household income, the less equal the household division of child care (B=1.668). In the urban sector, urban men with higher income did not try to bargain out of child care, but instead, they shared child care time more equally than did men with lower income.

Third, in urban areas, when the husband and the wife have the same amount of earnings, this was associated with a less equal gendered division of child care with the wife spending more time with their children. No such finding is found in rural areas. The result is consistent with the doing gender perspective .

Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to understand the gendered division of child care time between spouses in urban and rural sectors in China over the past decade, and how one's own or spouse's employment status, educational achievement, and earnings impact the division.

This research has applied the relative resources theory, doing gender perspective, and gender attitudes model to analyze different patterns in the gendered division of child care in urban and rural China, suggesting that, in addition to the wife's own employment status, the husband's employment status as well as income have played important roles in influencing the labor division inside the household.

In terms of the gendered division of child care, although it was more equal among urban couples than rural couples, the gender gap in child care may be widening in the urban sector due to increased women's child care time but narrowing in the rural sector due to decreased rural women's child care time.

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