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Accounting for the Value of Unpaid Domestic Work: A Cross-National Study of Variation across Household Types

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Abstract

This article estimates the value of extended earnings—market earnings plus the imputed value of unpaid work—and assesses how this alternative measure affects the level and distribution of economic wellbeing within households of differing compositions. Prior research finds that excluding the value of unpaid work distorts conclusions about women's contributions to household income and inequality more generally. Variation across household types has been understudied. The authors use data from the Harmonized European and American Time Use Surveys, combined with income data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database, to assess outcomes in six European countries and the United States. The study compares market to extended earnings to assess inequality within and across household types: single adults with and without children, and cohabiting adults with and without children. Key findings include: (i) women's time in unpaid work exceeds men's in all study countries; (ii) shifting from market earnings to extended earnings narrows gender disparities in all countries; and (iii) moving to extended earnings reduces inequality among both women and men, but more so among women. On all outcomes, we find that household composition shapes women's outcomes more than men's, and, overall, parenting status plays a larger role than partnership status.

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