

Abstract

Management of Housework by Child-Rearing Couples: From the Viewpoint of Sharing and Outsourcing of Housework

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PURPOSE & METHODS

The purpose of this study is to clarify how dual-earner couples raising children manage household duties from the perspective of sharing housework and outsourcing. The relationship between wife and husband in terms of household roles is regarded as a “manager–helper” bond, and therefore, it is a problem that the wife’s housework burden has not reduced even in present times. Keeping this in mind, it is important to understand how couples can manage housework together. In this paper, I have attempted an approach informed by two perspectives: “housework sharing” and “outsourcing of housework.”

The research questions I set are as follows:

- (1) How do couples who do housework on a daily basis manage the workload?
- (2) How does the outsourcing of housework reduce burden for the couples? How do couples make this decision?

In order to explore the details of the couples’ consciousness and behavior and the interactions between spouses, I adopted the interview survey method. A semi-structured interview was conducted with each couple individually for about 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes. They each have children under elementary school age. They share housework with each other. The survey was conducted from September 2017 to June 2018. There were 32 people who participated in the interviews (which included 14 couples and 4 people who were able to investigate only one of the couples).

RESULTS

The following findings were obtained.

- (1) Regarding the sharing of housework: The reference groups of husbands and wives differ in terms of taking responsibility for housework. It is thought that this explains the difference in level to be achieved. Furthermore, because it is difficult to share the management with each other, it was confirmed that the wife strengthened her awareness of responsibilities or encouraged her husband to meet the expected level of housework. On the other hand, it was also found that the wife reviewed her own standard by leaving the husband to do the housework. As for the husband, there is a possibility that the husband modified his attitude and behavior to respond to his wife’s suggestions. Regarding husbands who do more housework than their wives, there is a tendency for conflicts in

sharing housework, and it was necessary to redefine their own attitudes to overcome the conflict.

(2) About outsourcing of housework: Regarding outsourcing, in many cases, it seemed necessary for consensus in the couple's opinions. For this reason, there was a tendency that outsourcing was not done when couples differed in their needs for outsourcing. For example, there were cases in which married couples differed in the recognition of what they would get relative to costs of outsourcing, as expectations for household chores differed among couples. In addition, there were cases where couples did not strongly recognize the needs of externalization because they could cooperate with each other. There were cases where couples did not strongly recognize the needs of outsourcing because they could cooperate for housework. It is also clear that wives are strongly aware of the point of "for children" in considering outsourcing. In other words, it is suggested that the "thinking" required for care to be taken includes "responsibility for the future of care recipients." It was also found that a big burden hidden in managing housework is not only noticing the needs of the other in front of them but also considering the impact on the distant future. Also, even if household chores are to be externalized, coordination with people outside the home is necessary, and this burden has also been a factor leading to hesitation to use such services. However, it was shown that the burden can be alleviated as usage becomes more common.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, focusing on management of housework, that is, the "invisible part" of housework, it seems that married couples trying to manage housework together are inefficient, and sometimes, conflict emerges between them. Since management is supported by "sentient activity," it is difficult to share thoughts on this. Still it was suggested that there are two reasons behind couples trying to collaborate on housework. First, if the couple can manage housework together, there is a possibility for change in family roles. Secondly, the fact that both couples attempt to manage housework together, by themselves, is a practice of the value of "collaboration," leading to the establishment of more harmonious marital relationships. In order to share management, it was found that each couple understood the needs of the other, and looked for equilibrium points of mutual aid, i.e., consideration of the relationship between caregivers.