

# Care Burden and Relationship Satisfaction in Kazakhstan

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## Abstract

The COVID lockdown brought renewed attention to unpaid care work and its distribution within households. Significant literature shows that unequal division of housework is negatively associated with marital satisfaction (Frisco and Williams 2003; Greenstein 2009). Less research exists on the relationship between caregiving burden, its sharing between partners, and marital satisfaction (Ottmar, et. al., 2019). The birth of a child, presumably increasing a mother's share of care in the immediate term, has negatively impacted satisfaction in the first year in some studies, particularly for women (Hansen, 2012). At the same time, however, couples have shown less willingness to out-source care work (Roeters and Treas, 2011), perhaps indicating some positive utility benefits of providing care.

In this paper, we examine the relationship between care burden, sharing and satisfaction outcomes in the context of less developed markets for care provision, looking at the case of couples in Kazakhstan. We use the 2018 Gender and Generations survey, which suggests that over 60 percent of child care tasks are carried by women, whereas 35 percent are shared equally by couples (G&G 2018 KZ). We disaggregate that analysis across different types of caregiving (elder, child, spouse) and measure satisfaction using a vector of relationship and mental health outcomes. Drawing on the rich set of questions on care values and tasks division, we examine the ways that values are associated with care burden sharing and satisfaction. Finally, this data permits a unique addition to the analysis--we examine the ways that care burden and care sharing are associated with the satisfaction of the care recipient. As governments seek to address care needs globally, and Kazakhstan still experiences a high fertility rate (2.65 children per women in 2022), this analysis highlights areas of focus most likely to enhance the satisfaction of couple-providers.

### 1) Introduction:

The COVID lockdown brought renewed attention to unpaid care work and its distribution within households. Significant literature shows that unequal division of housework is negatively associated with marital satisfaction for women (Stevens, et. al., 2005), but there has been less research on the relationship between care work, its sharing between partners, and marital satisfaction (Stevens, et. al., 2005; Schober, 2012). There are reasons to believe that sharing of care burden may affect marital satisfaction differently from the division of housework. There is

evidence that childcare can enhance happiness, even while also being stressful and time-consuming (Hansen, 2012). Elder care, for parents or spouses, appears more stressful than childcare, but may also bring benefits (Brown et al. 2019; Kim et al. 2009).

Most of existing research on unpaid work and marital satisfaction focuses on developed market economies, where there are likely to be options for outsourcing care work, although a few studies include China (Oshio, et. al., 2013; Qian and Sayer, 2016). In this paper, we examine the relationship between care burden, sharing and marital satisfaction in the context of less developed markets for care provision, and strong social norms identifying house and care work as the responsibility of women, looking at the case of couples in Kazakhstan. We find that, with the inclusion of the sharing of care work in the analysis, the sharing of household tasks is not significantly associated with marital satisfaction. Doing more care work is significantly associated with marital satisfaction for both women and men—those who do more care work are less satisfied, controlling for their employment status, health, income, and demographic characteristics. For women, this supports previous work on the division of unpaid work in developed market contexts and China (Stevens, et. al, 2005; Schober, 2012; Qian and Sayer, 2016). However, previous studies of Japan, China and the U.K. found no association for men (Qian and Sayer, 2016; Oshio, 2013; Schober. 2012).

Previous work suggests that the relationship between sharing of unpaid work and marital satisfaction will be mediated by preference and social norms (Qian and Sayer, 2016; Schober, 2012). We find very strong associations with preferences, such that including a measure of satisfaction with the sharing of care eliminates the association with sharing, even though these variables are only weakly correlated. Preference alignment also appears important. Controlling for the level of disagreements among the couple, women's marital satisfaction is again

significantly negatively associated with doing more of the care. As with most previous work on this topic, we are unable to control for the possibly reciprocal relationship between marital satisfaction and the sharing of care. The limited previous research which has been able to examine this issue in the U.K. (Schober, 2012) does not find that the association is mainly due to reverse causality. Increasing the supply of affordable childcare and supervised child activities may be one way to increase couples' satisfaction and marital stability in Kazakhstan, particularly in the current context of increased expectations of women's employment.

## 2) Previous Research on Unpaid Work and Marital Satisfaction:

A significant literature has addressed the relationship between the division of unpaid work and marital satisfaction. Conceptually, some researchers pointed out that the relationship may be "reciprocal," (Schober, 2012) in that a satisfactory division of labor may lead to greater marital satisfaction, but at the same time greater marital satisfaction may affect the ways that the work is shared. Evidence on this will be considered in more detail below. We begin by examining the research which considers the division of labor as a potential source of marital satisfaction, while recognizing that the majority of this work is not able to specifically establish the direction of causality.

There is a substantial body of evidence showing that "relational maintenance behaviors (like household task sharing)" may be associated with marital satisfaction, and that this relationship varies by gender (Badr, 2008). More equitable sharing of housework has been associated with greater marital satisfaction for women in the US, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. A greater share of housework for men (more equal sharing of housework) was negatively associated with men's marital satisfaction in the US, Korea, and Japan in studies by Stevens, et. al. (2005) and Qian and

Sayer (2016). However, results vary across contexts and models. Oshio, et. al. (2013) found no associations between men's or women's share of housework and satisfaction in China. Qian and Sayer (2016) do not find significant associations for men or women in urban China, or for men in Taiwan.

Some research has included care work as part of housework. Kobayashi et. al. (2016) examine whether the relationship between husband's share of combined house and child care work and wife's marital satisfaction depends on the employment status of the spouses in Japan. They find that, for single-earner households (mostly male-earner), both spouses are more satisfied when the wife does most of the unpaid work. But for dual earner households, both spouses are more satisfied when the other spouse does more unpaid work. Khawaja and Habib (2007) are unique among these studies in including elder care in unpaid work. They find that husband's participation in combined care and housework was positively associated with wife's marital satisfaction in urban Lebanon in 2002-2003.

There are reasons to believe that housework and care work may impact marital satisfaction differently, however, suggesting that they should be analyzed separately (Newkirk, Perry-Jenkins, and Sayer, 2017; Schober, 2012). Unlike housework, which most people prefer to avoid, people may derive pleasure from performing childcare (Riley & Kiger, 1999; Stevens, et. al., 2005). A number of pathways have been suggested for the positive impacts on marital satisfaction of men, specifically. Paternal involvement in child care can contribute to the overall well-being and happiness for the father (Eggebeen and Knoester, 2001; Wilson and Prior, 2011; Brandth and Kvande, 2017), enhance men's sense of obligation to the family (McClain, 2011) and increase men's respect for the care work provided by mothers (Brandth and Kvande, 2017), all of which may contribute to marital satisfaction.

Research has shown that the level of paternal involvement in childcare can positively affect the parental relationship in the U.S. (McBride and Mills, 1993). Not all studies of U.S. households find a relationship (Carlson, et. al., 2011), however, and most of the research has considered engagement in the work but not its sharing. Among the few researchers that have examined the impact of the sharing of unpaid care work, separately from housework, on marital satisfaction, results have been mixed. Stevens, et. al. (2005) use data from 96 couples in the U.S. state of Utah in the year 2000 and find associations similar to those commonly found for housework. Women's marital satisfaction increases with greater partner participation in childcare and decreases in their own, while men's satisfaction decreases in their own participation, although the significance is weak, and the results depend on the model. A study of Dutch couples also found a positive association of fathers' relative child care share with mothers' relationship satisfaction (Kalmijn, 1999). Using U.K. panel data to partially address endogeneity concerns<sup>1</sup>, Schober (2012) finds that mother's marital satisfaction, but not father's, is positively associated with a higher share of childcare done by father in the earliest periods of parenthood, but not in the longer run, and the effect was stronger for non-employed women. The women's results differ from men's positive effects of *levels* of their own care on satisfaction, while share had no relationship to marital satisfaction. Importantly, Stevens, et. al. (2005) and Schober (2012) do not find a significant relationship between unpaid housework and marital satisfaction when controlling for child care performance and emotional work performance, another factor that Stevens, et. al. (2005) consider.

The association between division of elder care and marital satisfaction has been little studied. As with childcare, there can be emotional benefits from engaging competently with the

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<sup>1</sup> Because of changes in the childcare measure, Schober was not able to completely address endogeneity concerns, although she does use lagged measures of childcare to partially addressing causality concerns.

elder, particularly if the elder is the biological parent of the care giver. However, the provision of elder care can also take a significant physical and mental toll, based on studies in the US, Israel, and South Korea (Amirthanyan and Wolf, 2003; 2006; Khalaila and Litwin, 2011; Hensley et. al., 2021). In South Korea, heavier elder care burdens are associated with lower levels of life satisfaction (Hensley, et. al., 2022). A few studies have examined the relationship between women's elder care giving and marital quality in the U.S. These studies generally find a negative association between women's long-term provision of elder care and marital satisfaction (Sutor and Pillemar, 1994; Martire, et. al., 1997; Bookwala et al, 2007; Bookwala, 2009). The elder care studies used panel data and, in Bookwala (2009), examined the change in marital satisfaction before and after the onset of caregiving, alleviating concerns about reverse causality. However, none of these studies addressed the relationship of marital satisfaction to the sharing of elder care labor between members of the couple.

Many researchers have shown that the relationship between the division of housework and marital satisfaction is mediated by other factors. As noted above, Kobayashi et. al. (2016) find that in Japan the relationship between total unpaid work and marital satisfaction varies by the employment status of spouses. Other scholars find that personal preferences, gender ideologies, and social norms are important mediators, such that the satisfaction with the division of labor is more important than the division of labor itself (Kluwer & Heesink, 1996; Lavee and Katz, 2002; Stevens et al 2005). Qian and Sayer (2016) and Oshio et. al. (2013) argue that macro-level social contexts and gender ideology explain the variations in their results across Asian countries. Wilkie et al. (1998), looking at US couples, find that the division of labor affects marital satisfaction mainly through perceptions of fairness.

As with unpaid housework, the relationship between unpaid care work and marital satisfaction may also be mediated by employment, preferences and norms. Looking at U.S. couples' satisfaction with care work arrangements, Walker (1999) found that "Because involvement in childcare is viewed as women's responsibility, more so than men's, any involvement in childcare by men increases women's satisfaction with the childcare arrangement. Indeed, if fathers appear willing to do childcare, regardless of actual childcare performed, women's satisfaction with the arrangement is enhanced" (cited in Stevens, et al., 2005). If women view child care as one of few areas in which they have traditionally had more power, however, father's engagement may undermine the wife's identity (Fagan and Barnett, 2003; Gaunt, 2008, cited in Schober, 2012). These studies suggest that satisfaction with the childcare arrangement may contribute to marital satisfaction. Schober (2012) finds that the relationship between care division and marital satisfaction of women is mediated by the wife's employment status, and argues that this is because employment status will reflect the preferred identities of the parents.

As noted at the beginning of this section, the relationship between marital satisfaction and division of household labor may be reciprocal (endogenous). Numerous studies, mainly based on small, non-representative samples, have focused on the pathway from relationship quality to parental engagement in care, although these have mainly not considered the sharing of care (Erel & Burman, 1995; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Two studies are able to examine the relationship using large representative data sets (Carlson, et. al., 2011; Schober, 2012). Carlson, et. al. (2011) find that a composite measure of both partners' relationship quality positively impacts parental engagement during infancy for U.S. parents, but not longer term engagement, but does not consider the impact of sharing or disaggregate the effects by gender. Schober (2012) analyzes both engagement in and sharing of care work, finding that mothers' marital satisfaction predicts greater parenting engagement and sharing by fathers in the earliest years, but only engagement

(and weakly) in later years. Fathers' own satisfaction with the relationship was not associated with their childcare engagement or share. Overall, there is not strong evidence that the relationship between sharing of unpaid work and marital satisfaction is driven by reverse causality.

In section 5), below, we examine the relationship between care work and marital satisfaction in Kazakhstan, and whether this differs from the relationship between housework and marital satisfaction. Following previous research, we examine the relationship separately for men and women. We consider whether the relationship is related to the employment status of the spouses, as well as the role of the respondent's gender norms and satisfaction with sharing arrangements in mediating the relationship between unpaid work and marital satisfaction. Like most others, we are not able to examine the spousal division of elder care work, but we control for the need for such work. Also, like most other papers, we are not able to control for the potentially reciprocal nature of the relationship between the division of labor and marital satisfaction.

### 3) Kazakhstan Background:

Previous research suggests that the relationship between the division of care work and marital satisfaction may be mediated by men's and women's labor force participation rates, social norms, and fairness perceptions, as well as the magnitude and type of care work in the household. A post-socialist country, Kazakhstan has a fairly high rate of female labor force participation. There is substantial state-provided (and reasonably affordable) child care for children starting at 3 years of age, but little institutional care for younger children or elders.

The female labor force participation rate has hovered around 72% since 2000, while men's labor force participation rate has remained fairly steady at 76-77% (National Institute of Statistics, 2021). However, mothers of children under 3 years of age are less likely than other



women to work outside the home, 14% less likely in 2016, according to one estimate (Meurs, et. al., 2021).

The structure of government parental support in Kazakhstan contributes to mothers' responsibility for care. Mothers in Kazakhstan are eligible for 126 days of paid maternity leave (56 days of which are given after the birth). Additionally, one family member is entitled to one year of paid childcare leave after the birth, plus another two years of unpaid leave (OECD, 2017). While the childcare leave may be taken by the father, grandparents, another relative, it is usually taken by the mother, both due to both economics and preferences. There are no special incentives for fathers to take the leave, and employers are not required to provide such leave to fathers.

Combining paid maternity and care leave provides leave until the child is about 18 months old. Limited paid care is available for children until they reach 3 years of age, however, and most of it is offered through more expensive private child care centers. According to government statistics, only 31.7% of children under 3 attended childcare centers in 2018, although this share varies significantly by region (National Statistical Office, 2020; Atanaeva, et. al., 2019), with very low enrollment rates in Astana (12.3%) and Almaty (17.9%) cities, and higher enrollment rates in East Kazakhstan (39.0%), Pavlodar (39.6%), West Kazakhstan (36.1%) oblasts. (Meurs, et. al., 2022).

Couples, particularly women, provide most care for children under 3, and a small recent survey by the Gender Economics Research Center at Narxoz University suggests that families prefer to provide care for the youngest children at home (Meurs, et. al., 2022). The majority of children 3-6 attend pre-school (government statistics report 95% of children 3-6 years old were

enrolled in 2018) (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018a; 2012), but of course these children, and children of school age, also require significant family care.

Less data is available on the need and provision of elder care. It is a legal responsibility of the family to provide care for elderly members, and families widely support this approach. Institutions for assisted living are not developed, and day care centers and in-home assistance are also not widely available. A small survey of 200 individuals providing elder care to a family member in 2022, using a snowball sampling method in 5 urban and rural municipalities, found that 82% of elder care givers were women. The average reported time on elder care among these care givers was 36 hours per week (Meurs, et. al., 2022).

Increasing female labor force participation is a stated policy priority in Kazakhstan, and the government has recognized the negative association with care work. The Kazakhstan 2016 Concept of Family and Gender Policy prioritizes expanding the coverage of preschool education of children from 1 to 3 years old in order to increase women's employment and create favorable conditions for combining the responsibilities of raising children with work (Concept, 2016).

People providing care will, of course, combine care work with their housework tasks. Like care for small children, housework is unevenly shared, with men engaging in an average of 1.85 hours of domestic work per day, while women perform an average of 4.10 hours per day (<https://w3.unece.org/>).

Although the distribution of unpaid work is highly uneven, survey data suggests that this division of labor is in line with prevailing social norms. Asked in the 2016 EBRD Life in Transition Survey whether they agreed that "women should do most of the household work even if the man is not working," 85% of interviewed working age women agreed or strongly agreed. Sixty-nine percent of working-age women agreed or strongly agreed that "It is better for

everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children" (Meurs, et. al., 2021). Specifically considering care work norms, the 2019 Gender and Generations Survey used in the analysis below found that 64.79% of men and 62.39% felt that women were definitely better at caring for children. At the same time, however, when asked whose task it is to look after the home and children, the most common answer for both men (47%) and women (42%) in the 2019 Gender and Generations Survey was that it is the responsibility of "both men and women equally," suggesting some acceptance of a more equal distribution of work.

Analysis of the Gender and Generations Survey data revealed that women in Kazakhstan perform the vast majority of unpaid household and childcare work. Moreover, women bear unpaid care work whether or not they are employed. The data reveal a gap between care needs and existing services, which affects the ability to redistribute household and childcare care responsibilities to market or state providers.

#### 4) Data and Couple Characteristics:

For our analysis, we use the first wave of the Gender and Generations Survey in Kazakhstan that was conducted in 2018 on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan by the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, with the technical support of the UN Population Fund. The survey is nationally representative. The sample covered 14,829 respondents aged 18-79 and collected information on work, family life, and social opinions. The survey asks about the division of housework and childcare work separately.

For our analysis of the division of care work and marital satisfaction, we construct a sample of the respondents living with an opposite-sex spouse/partner in a household and who responded that they or their spouse participate in child care. Because the relationship between unpaid care work and marital satisfaction is mediated by the employment status of the spouses, we limit the sample to respondents of working age (below 61 years for women and 63 for men). After dropping a few additional cases with missing data, this gives us a sample of 4582 respondents and their partners, 1971 male respondents and 2611 female respondents. We have data on tasks and marital satisfaction as reported by the respondents, and we conduct our analysis for male (43% of the sample) and female (57% of the sample) respondents separately.

Our measure of marital satisfaction is the response to the question: "How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner/spouse?" measured on a 10 point scale, where 0 is "not at all satisfied" and 10 is "completely satisfied." Overall, both men and women are highly satisfied with their relationship. Ninety-eight percent of men and 95% of women report levels of 8 or higher. Men are more likely to report the highest levels of satisfaction however—82% of men report a 10, while 78% of women do.

For our variable of interest, respondent's share of childcare tasks, we take the number of listed childcare tasks<sup>2</sup> that the respondent reports usually or always doing, divided by the total number of tasks that the respondent reports being done by self or partner. If the tasks are reported to be "not applicable" or as being done by a household member other than the respondent or partner, those tasks are excluded from our sharing measure. We treat sharing of household tasks in the same way. To examine the role of satisfaction with caring arrangements, we use the response to the question "How satisfied are you with the way childcare tasks are divided between

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<sup>2</sup> The survey asks about five childcare tasks: dressing, staying with ill children, playing with children, doing homework, and putting children to bed

you and your partner/spouse?" As with marital satisfaction, this is measured on a 10 point scale, from "not at all satisfied" to "completely satisfied."

Gender norms are measured using the question "Whose task is it to look after home and children, men or women?" We create a dummy variable taking a value of 1 if the response is "women slightly" or "women definitely" (compared to "equally," "men slightly," or "men definitely," which are coded as 0). As an additional factor, we consider the general contentiousness of the relationship, a measure of how many issues (out of 7 listed issues) the couple argues over "frequently" or "very frequently."<sup>3</sup> As the survey questions about elder care included many missing values, we control for this source of care demand (which is usually provided by women) by including the number of people in the household of 70 years of age and the number of disabled people.

Following previous work, we control for the age and education (a set of 4 dummy variables: incomplete education, complete secondary or vocational education, university education, post-graduate degree, with incomplete education as the omitted variable) of the respondent and partner, whether the respondent is in good health (a dummy variable, where 1 represents good health), the number of children of different age groups (0-2, 3-6, 7-12, 13-18), which may affect both housework and care needs, and whether the household has difficulty making ends meet (a proxy for income; the income variable has many missing values). We also included a control for the number of adult females in the household, who may support the unpaid work even if they are not directly reported as doing the task. Finally, we control for the respondent's region of residence using a set of 16 dummy variables, with Almaty as the omitted

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<sup>3</sup> The issues are: household chores, money, use of leisure time, relations with friends, relations with parents and in-laws, having children, child-raising issues.

region, to account for other differences in cultural traditions, infrastructure and labor market structures.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for respondents and partners. We see that female respondents and partners are more highly educated than male respondents and partners. Male respondents and male partners are, on average, around three years older than female respondents. Male and female respondents live in households with very similar care needs.

Male-female differences in employment are more significant than suggested by official data on labor force participation, with 84% of men reporting that they are employed, self-employed, or helping in a family business, while only 49 percent of women respondents report such activity. Similarly, fifty-two percent of the male respondents' partners are employed, while 88% of female respondents' partners are.

Looking at our variables of interest, which are reported only for respondents, we see that men respondents report slightly (but significantly) higher average levels of marital satisfaction than women (9.7 and 9.5, respectively, on a 10 point scale). Similarly, when asked about how often they disagree with their partner about household and family issues, slightly more women (11%) than men (10.7%) report disagreeing frequently or very frequently. On the sharing of care tasks, on average women report that they always or usually do 53% of the 5 tasks listed that are performed (putting child to bed, dressing the child, playing with the child, assisting with homework, staying home with an ill child—not all couples perform every task as, for example, older children may not require help dressing), whereas men on average report that they always or usually do 3% of the required tasks. When asked how satisfied they are with this arrangement, on a scale of 1 to 10, men and women report similar levels of satisfaction (9.6 for men and 9.3 for women, but the difference is not statistically significant). Women also do a larger share of the

household tasks as well, “always” or “usually” doing 57% of the 6 tasks, while men report “always” or “usually” doing 18% of the tasks. On the question of whether it is a woman’s responsibility to care for the home and children, more men than women agree or strongly agree, but the difference is small (50% of men and 46% of women).

It might be expected that some of the key variables in the analysis—share of child care tasks, share of household work tasks, social norms about who should care for the home and family, satisfaction with the division of care work, and couple disagreements would be highly correlated. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix for these key variables, as well as the number of children in different age groups, for men and women separately. We see that, for both men and women, many of the correlations among the key variables are statistically significant, but they are small in magnitude. The highest correlation for both women and men is between the share of household tasks they usually or always do and their share of child care tasks (0.34 for women and 0.42 for men). Satisfaction with care sharing and the share of care one does is weakly correlated (negatively) for both women and men ( -0.15 and -0.09, respectively). Share of household tasks and couple disagreements and share of household tasks and satisfaction with the care arrangement are significantly correlated only for women (0.05 and -0.04), as is the share of child care tasks and the belief that women should take responsibility for caring for the home and family (0.13).

##### 5) Empirical Analysis: Marital Satisfaction and Sharing of Care

In this section, we examine the association between marital satisfaction and the couple’s sharing of care. We first replicate the more common analysis of sharing of housework tasks, in order to see how this established association might be affected by the inclusion of sharing of care

work as a distinct variable. We next examine the relationship between marital satisfaction and the division of care work, controlling for sharing of house work, and finally, we consider mediating variables previously found to correlate with satisfaction with sharing arrangements—employment status of the partners, their satisfaction with the sharing, and gender norms about the household division of labor.



**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis**  
**Male = 1,971, Female = 2,611 observations**

Variable	Male				Female			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
marital satisfaction	0	10	9.66***	0.88	1	10	9.54	1.05
age of a respondent	19	63	37.25***	8.02	18	59	34.54	7.35
partner's age	18	60	34.37	7.97	20	62	37.74***	7.97
satisfaction with childcare task sharing	0	10	9.63	0.94	0	10	9.34	1.25
partner activity status								
Unemployed	0	1	0.52***	0.50	0	1	0.12	0.33
Employed	0	1	0.48	0.50	0	1	0.88***	0.33
respondent's activity status								
Unemployed	0	1	0.16	0.36	0	1	0.51***	0.50
Employed	0	1	0.84***	0.36	0	1	0.49	0.50
HH has difficulty to meet ends	0	1	0.67	0.47	0	1	0.67	0.47
respondent's health	0	1	0.11	0.31	0	1	0.13**	0.34
respondent's share in doing HH tasks	0	1	0.18	0.18	0	1	0.57***	0.22
partner's education level								
Incomplete education	0	1	0.25	0.44	0	1	0.31***	0.46
Complete secondary or vocational education	0	1	0.32	0.47	0	1	0.36***	0.48
University education	0	1	0.42***	0.49	0	1	0.33	0.47
Post-graduate degree	0	1	0.01***	0.07	0	1	0.004	0.06
respondent's education level								
Incomplete education	0	1	0.33***	0.47	0	1	0.25	0.44
Complete secondary or vocational education	0	1	0.34***	0.47	0	1	0.32	0.47
University education	0	1	0.33	0.47	0	1	0.42***	0.49
Post-graduate degree	0	1	0.01	0.08	0	1	0.01***	0.08
HH member having disability	0	2	0.02	0.14	0	2	0.02	0.16
number of elders aged 70+	0	2	0.05	0.26	0	2	0.06	0.26
number of children aged 0-2	0	4	0.46	0.63	0	4	0.46	0.63
number of children aged 3-6	0	4	0.61	0.73	0	4	0.63	0.73
number of children aged 7-12	0	6	0.82	0.88	0	6	0.84	0.86
number of children aged 13-18	0	4	0.39	0.68	0	4	0.39	0.66
having value that women should take care	0	1	0.50	0.50	0	1	0.46*	0.50
respondent's share in childcare tasks	0	1	0.30	0.14	0	1	0.53***	0.37

couple disagreements	3	33	10.66	4.41	0	35	11.02***	4.50
number of adult females in the HH	0	5	1.28*	0.59	1	6	1.24	0.51

Notes. A set of 16 regional dummies is also included.

Statistically significant differences between the means are noted by asterisks adjacent to the larger of the two means.

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

**Table 2: Pairwise correlations for key variables**  
**A: male respondents**

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) marital satisfaction	1.000									
(2) satisfaction with childcare task sharing	0.482***	1.000								
(3) couple disagreements	-0.218***	-0.161***	1.000							
(4) having value that women should take care	-0.036*	-0.065***	-0.005	1.000						
(5) respondent's share in childcare tasks	-0.101***	-0.086***	0.017	-0.019	1.000					
(6) respondent's share in doing HH tasks	-0.081***	-0.025	0.012	-0.035	0.418***	1.000				
(7) number of children aged 0-2	0.037*	0.003	0.000	-0.005	-0.029	0.010	1.000			
(8) number of children aged 3-6	0.054**	0.071***	0.009	0.020	-0.008	0.015	-0.042*	1.000		
(9) number of children aged 7-12	0.043*	0.040*	-0.043*	0.007	-0.003	-0.07***	-0.260***	-0.111***	1.000	
(10) number of children aged 13-18	0.022	0.011	-0.038*	0.029	0.014	-0.005	-0.282***	-0.148***	0.116***	1.000

\*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.1

**B: female respondents**

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) marital satisfaction	1.000									
(2) satisfaction with childcare task sharing	0.441***	1.000								
(3) couple disagreements	-0.258***	-0.235***	1.000							
(4) having value that women should take care	0.080***	0.052***	-0.030	1.000						
(5) respondent's share in childcare tasks	-0.079***	-0.152***	0.021	0.127***	1.000					
(6) respondent's share in doing HH tasks	0.003	-0.036*	0.045**	0.010	0.344***	1.000				
(7) number of children aged 0-2	0.055***	0.011	-0.002	0.008	0.067***	0.021	1.000			
(8) number of children aged 3-6	0.032*	0.037*	0.027	0.033*	0.041**	0.033*	-0.027	1.000		
(9) number of children aged 7-12	0.023	0.005	-0.003	0.017	-0.020	0.007	-0.208***	-0.121***	1.000	
(10) number of children aged 13-18	-0.002	0.030	-0.023	0.014	0.018	-0.005	-0.210***	-0.168***	0.103***	1.000

\*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.1

Results are presented in Table 3. In Model 1, we replicate the basic analysis of the relationship between household tasks and marital satisfaction (Oshio, et. al., 2013; Stevens, et. al. 2005), without considering the sharing of care work or other possible mediating factors. We find that, in Kazakhstan, women do not report lower marital satisfaction when they always or usually do more of the household tasks. Men, however, do report significantly lower levels of marital satisfaction when they usually or always do more of the household tasks. Men's satisfaction is strongly positively associated with having children over two years of age, while women's is positively associated but the relationship is not significant. Associations with other covariates are as expected, with both men and women reporting lower marital satisfaction when the household faces greater difficulties in making ends meet and when they are in bad health. Women's satisfaction is more closely associated with these factors. Age and education are not significantly associated with satisfaction, controlling for other factors. The associations between marital satisfaction and these common covariates, including the presence of children, are consistent throughout the other models, and we do not discuss them further below.

In Model 2, we introduce controls for respondent and partner economic activity status, following Kobayashi, et. al. (2016). Men's marital satisfaction is positively associated with being economically active although the relationship is not statistically significant, while women's satisfaction is significantly negatively associated with employment, perhaps due to the challenges of balancing paid and unpaid work. Controlling for economic activity status slightly reduces the association between household task share and marital satisfaction for men while increasing it for women, although the association remains statistically insignificant for women.

In Model 3 we introduce the control for social norms (agreement that women should take responsibility for caring for the home and children). Women who agree with this statement are,

perhaps not surprisingly, more satisfied with their (generally unequal) marriages. Agreeing with this statement is not significantly associated with men's marital satisfaction.

Model 4 shows our main result, the link between marital satisfaction and the sharing of care work. We see that marital satisfaction is strongly negatively correlated with doing a greater share of child care tasks, although the magnitude of the association is greater for men. Including the association with childcare tasks in the analysis greatly reduces the magnitude of the association between the man's share of household tasks and marital satisfaction and it loses significance, while for women, the inclusion causes a change in association of marital satisfaction with housework from negative to positive, but does not increase the significance. For women, child care task sharing is clearly more closely associated with marital satisfaction than sharing housework. Our controls for elder and disabled care, a care burden normally borne by women are not statistically significant in any of our analyses.

In Model 5, we include a control for satisfaction with the sharing of childcare tasks. We see that, when we include this variable, the share of childcare tasks loses significance for men and decreases the impact for women, while increasing the explanatory power of the model significantly. A greater share of childcare tasks is negatively associated with marital satisfaction in general but not surprisingly, what really matters is how you feel about this. Finally, in Model 6, we include the measure of disagreements. Both men and women report lower levels of satisfaction in relationships where they frequently disagree about more issues; the magnitude of the association is larger for women. Controlling for disagreements, childcare share is negatively associated with marital satisfaction for women, although the significance is weak.

**Table 3: Regressions of Marital Satisfaction**  
**A: male respondents (N=1,971)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Y: marital satisfaction						
age of a respondent	-0.00109	-0.00076	-0.00099	-0.00072	-0.00041	-0.00161
respondent's education level (Reference: Incomplete education)						
Complete secondary or vocational education	0.00293	-0.00174	-0.000801	0.00129	-0.00513	-0.00925
University education	0.0776	0.0706	0.0704	0.0698	0.0293	0.0186
Post-graduate degree	-0.0602	-0.0702	-0.0797	-0.0825	-0.171	-0.174
respondent's health	-0.281**	-0.276**	-0.279**	-0.264**	-0.135	-0.0947
partner's age	-0.00803	-0.00806	-0.00787	-0.00812	-0.00645	-0.00604
partner's education level (Reference: Incomplete education)						
Complete secondary or vocational education	-0.00859	-0.00702	-0.0101	-0.0115	-0.00632	0.00552
University education	0.0332	0.0366	0.0343	0.0337	0.0583	0.0587
Post-graduate degree	0.0925	0.0975	0.0869	0.0645	0.0509	0.0223
HH has difficulty to meet ends	-0.16***	-0.16***	-0.157***	-0.156***	-0.106**	-0.0810*
HH member having disability	0.138	0.143	0.145	0.155	0.143	0.155
number of elders aged 70+	-0.193	-0.187	-0.186	-0.188	-0.151	-0.145
number of adult females in the HH	0.0618	0.0602	0.0605	0.0566	0.0474	0.0442
number of children aged 0-2	0.0404	0.0379	0.0351	0.0345	0.0325	0.0321
number of children aged 3-6	0.0489*	0.0482*	0.0480	0.0473	0.0121	0.0169
number of children aged 7-12	0.0666**	0.0663**	0.0652**	0.0657**	0.0362	0.0345
number of children aged 13-18	0.0991**	0.0989**	0.0985**	0.0974**	0.0628*	0.0595*
region (Reference: Almaty)						
Akmolinskaya	0.459***	0.456***	0.451***	0.457***	0.290*	0.190
Aktubinskaya	0.127	0.128	0.125	0.151	0.106	0.00427
Almatinskaya	0.601***	0.592***	0.597***	0.606***	0.362***	0.278***
Atyrauskaya	0.500***	0.492***	0.491***	0.490***	0.297***	0.326***
West-Kazakhstanskaya	0.693***	0.684***	0.668***	0.687***	0.660***	0.548***
Zhambylskaya	0.185	0.193	0.196	0.209	0.263*	0.208*
Karagandinskaya	0.441***	0.436***	0.433***	0.440***	0.277**	0.192*
Kostanaiskaya	0.367***	0.359**	0.355**	0.360**	0.248**	0.172
Kyzylordinskaya	0.654***	0.651***	0.653***	0.673***	0.420***	0.297***
Mangistauskaya	0.0554	0.0502	0.0657	0.0774	0.228*	0.215*
South-Kazakhstanskaya	0.365***	0.366***	0.368***	0.375***	0.305***	0.208**
Pavlodarskaya	0.578***	0.574***	0.568***	0.577***	0.357***	0.257**
North-Kazakhstanskaya	0.494***	0.491***	0.476***	0.482***	0.276**	0.172
East-Kazakhstanskaya	0.377***	0.372**	0.366**	0.371**	0.215	0.110
Astana	0.252*	0.249*	0.248*	0.252*	0.107	-0.0173

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Y: marital satisfaction						
respondent's share in doing HH tasks	-0.365**	-0.363**	-0.368**	-0.223	-0.215	-0.214
respondent's activity status		0.0635	0.0577	0.0480	0.0184	0.0311
partner activity status		-0.0156	-0.0191	-0.0115	0.0206	0.0287
having value that women should take care			-0.0545	-0.0550	-0.0102	-0.0165
respondent's share in childcare tasks				-0.435*	-0.233	-0.222
satisfaction with childcare task sharing					0.422***	0.407***
couple disagreements						-0.0271***
constant	9.554***	9.502***	9.542***	9.529***	5.515***	6.027***
R-sq	0.087	0.088	0.088	0.092	0.272	0.287

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

**B: female respondents (N=2,611)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Y: marital satisfaction						
age of a respondent	-0.00328	-0.00260	-0.00256	-0.00187	-0.00041	-0.000437
respondent's education level (Reference: Incomplete education)						
Complete secondary or vocational education	-0.0745	-0.0581	-0.0530	-0.0615	-0.0364	-0.0176
University education	-0.0741	-0.0400	-0.0300	-0.0406	-0.0332	-0.0211
Post-graduate degree	-0.100	-0.0346	-0.0316	-0.0428	0.0754	0.0887
respondent's health	-0.52***	-0.52***	-0.51***	-0.49***	-0.27***	-0.227**
partner's age	-0.00498	-0.00491	-0.00495	-0.00499	-0.00819	-0.00853
partner's education level (Reference: Incomplete education)						
Complete secondary or vocational education	0.0241	0.0145	0.0280	0.0285	0.0459	0.0452
University education	0.0666	0.0541	0.0651	0.0586	0.108	0.100
Post-graduate degree	0.356	0.320	0.311	0.313	0.393*	0.326
HH has difficulty to meet ends	-0.2***	-0.19***	-0.19***	-0.19***	-0.15***	-0.099**
HH member having disability	0.0180	0.0214	0.0192	0.0296	-0.00394	-0.0200
number of elders aged 70+	0.0623	0.0608	0.0636	0.0434	0.0516	0.0494
number of adult females in the HH	0.0345	0.0368	0.0330	0.0440	0.0278	0.0261
number of children aged 0-2	0.0369	0.00602	0.0108	0.0163	0.0142	0.0183
number of children aged 3-6	0.0115	0.00970	0.00959	0.0135	-0.00339	0.00453
number of children aged 7-12	0.0414	0.0431	0.0455*	0.0402	0.0441*	0.0441*
number of children aged 13-18	0.0255	0.0296	0.0314	0.0321	0.0201	0.0173
region (Reference: Almaty)						

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Y: marital satisfaction						
Akmolinskaya	0.566***	0.568***	0.581***	0.570***	0.313*	0.182
Aktubinskaya	0.0992	0.0928	0.0938	0.0705	0.161	0.0380
Almatinskaya	0.884***	0.868***	0.843***	0.836***	0.576***	0.456***
Atyrauskaya	0.783***	0.782***	0.779***	0.752***	0.508***	0.541***
West-Kazakhstanskaya	0.874***	0.886***	0.912***	0.904***	0.669***	0.551***
Zhambylskaya	0.741***	0.741***	0.729***	0.716***	0.612***	0.541***
Karagandinskaya	0.334**	0.326**	0.322*	0.298*	0.191	0.0921
Kostanaiskaya	0.500***	0.500***	0.498***	0.451***	0.268*	0.196
Kyzylordinskaya	0.813***	0.807***	0.793***	0.788***	0.527***	0.378***
Mangistauskaya	0.329*	0.344*	0.300*	0.263	0.298*	0.303**
South-Kazakhstanskaya	0.732***	0.729***	0.715***	0.708***	0.525***	0.420***
Pavlodarskaya	0.889***	0.869***	0.876***	0.836***	0.590***	0.469***
North-Kazakhstanskaya	0.617***	0.612***	0.645***	0.623***	0.481***	0.377**
East-Kazakhstanskaya	0.744***	0.738***	0.749***	0.687***	0.482***	0.347***
Astana	0.386**	0.363**	0.358**	0.360**	0.214*	0.0741
respondent's share in doing HH tasks	-0.0181	-0.0245	-0.0269	0.144	0.103	0.150
respondent's activity status		-0.129**	-0.120**	-0.141**	-0.110**	-0.0933*
partner activity status		0.116	0.122	0.127	0.156*	0.162**
having value that women should take care			0.129**	0.151***	0.113**	0.107**
respondent's share in childcare tasks				-0.3***	-0.111*	-0.117*
satisfaction with childcare task sharing					0.319***	0.296***
couple disagreements						-0.035***
constant	9.356***	9.296***	9.218***	9.262***	6.353***	6.976***
R-sq	0.113	0.117	0.12	0.129	0.252	0.27

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

## 6) Discussion and Conclusions:

Replicating previous work, which found that women's marital satisfaction is negatively associated with a greater share of household work in diverse contexts (Stevens, et. al., 2005 Qian and Sayer, 2016), we find that in Kazakhstan, where there are very strong norms delegating household management to women, women's marital satisfaction is not associated with their share of housework. Men's marital satisfaction is negatively associated with doing more of this work, perhaps due to its violation of social expectations. This is in line with some previous work (Stevens, et. al., 2005), but not research on China and Taiwan which found no such association (Oshio, 2013; Qian and Sayer, 2016 ).

Examining the less-studied question of the association between the sharing of care work and marital satisfaction, we find that doing a larger share of child care work is negatively associated with marital satisfaction for both men and women in Kazakhstan, although the association is stronger for men, perhaps due to strong social norms regarding the feminine nature of this role. These findings are similar to (although stronger than) those of Stevens, et. al. (2005) on U.S. couples and Kalmijn (2006) on Dutch couples, and also stronger than those found by Schober (2012) for the U.K. Schober (2012) uses panel data, however, and is able to partially address concerns about reverse causality, which we cannot do here. Schober's (2012) work suggests that our results may be biased upward but, based on her specifically examining the issue of the reciprocal (or reverse) relationship between marital satisfaction and child care sharing, does not suggest that the reverse relationship can fully explain the association. Our finding that elder and disabled care demands are not associated with marital satisfaction is not consistent with the limited previous research on this topic, but our measure does not capture specific care needs. A more complete examination of this question is an important topic for future work.



Importantly, our work is consistent with previous work finding that the inclusion of care work in analysis of the relation between marital satisfaction and the sharing of house work tasks renders the sharing of housework tasks insignificant. Care work sharing is a more important factor in marital satisfaction.

Similarly to Kobayashi, et. al. (2016) and Schober (2012), we find that the employment status of spouses can mediate the association between sharing of household tasks and marital satisfaction. Unlike Kobayashi, et. al. (2016) on Japan, however, and as in Schober (2012) on the U.K., we find this association mainly for women.

As with previous work (Stevens, et. al., 2005), we find that social norms are an important mediator in the association between sharing of care tasks and marital satisfaction. Both women and men who report being satisfied with the generally very unequal distribution of care tasks are more satisfied with their marriages. This satisfaction with care sharing is more importantly associated with marital satisfaction than the actual distribution of care tasks. Couple disagreements over task sharing and other issues may capture one way that inequality in the sharing of care work and dissatisfaction with this sharing may impact a relationship, and controlling for disagreements the sharing of care tasks somewhat strengthens the association between care sharing and marital satisfaction for women.

While almost half of respondents in the Gender and Generations Survey agree that care of home and family is a responsibility of men and women equally, this has not yet translated into a more equal allocation of unpaid home labor and childcare. Government policy still supports this unequal division of labor. Family-oriented labour market regulations for care leave and flexible work are accepted in Kazakhstan, but fathers have limited access to the policies and face social

stigma in utilizing them. In policy debates related to female employment in Kazakhstan, gender inequality in unpaid work is not yet considered an issue.

Strengthening the institution of the family and improving the well-being of its members is defined as an important state task under The Concept of Family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan Until 2030. To support this, the state aims to expand access to high-quality social support, including the creation of “jobs with equal access and paid parental leave for both parents” (Office of the President, 2016; Decree of the RK President, 2022). Increasing the supply of affordable childcare and supervised child activities is one additional way to increase couples’ satisfaction and marital stability in Kazakhstan, particularly in the current context of increased expectations of women’s employment. Investing in national care systems more broadly could reduce overall burdens on families and, in so doing, reduce women’s disproportionate share of this work. Policies are also needed, however, to explicitly recognize the importance and value of care work, the needs of caregivers, and to promote acceptance of men as full participants in care work.

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