

# Women's earnings and domestic work among couples in Ghana

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## Abstract

Research in feminist economics suggests that economic position can change gender relations at the household level. Much of this research, however, has been conducted in the Global North where the social structure is quite distinct from those in the Global South. Do Ghanaian women's earnings relieve their domestic work burdens or intensify them? Addressing this question is important to extend what we know about the empowering nature of work. So, this study aims to understand how women's earnings influence the extent to which they engage in domestic work in Ghana using two waves of the Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey (GSEPS) and a random effects regression model. We find that, on the one hand, higher earnings allow women to negotiate and bargain with their partners on domestic work allocations but, on the other hand, whether they are successful depends on the nature of their women. These results have implications for understanding the significance of women's monetary resources, separate from their male partners, and the design of appropriate development policies and interventions.

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## **1. Introduction**

According to Article 24 of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours. In many parts of the world, particularly in the Global South, women bear a triple burden of work – they perform duties at the market, domestic and community levels. Market work may include self- or wage-employment; domestic work includes looking after children, the elderly and performing housework; while community tasks include preserving culture and tradition, through the organisation of funerals and religious ceremonies. The competing demand of this triple role puts women's health at risk; when women are overworked, this has an impact on the whole household, including children and youth (FAO, 2016). Tontoh (2021) also provides an interesting description of women's triple day burden of work, where this comprises women's market work, reproductive work of childcare and self-reproductive work.

Research dating back to the 1980s and 1990s has noted significant differences in gender time burdens (Ilahi, 2000; Blackden and Bhanu, 1999). The situation is not different in more recent times (Wodon and Ying, 2010). Globally, women carry out 75 percent of all unpaid care and domestic work. According to the UN (2016), women spend up to three hours more a day doing housework than men and spend up to 10 times the amount of time a day caring for children and the elderly. In sub-Saharan Africa, where basic amenities are not accessible, the burden can be extraordinary. For example, women in the region spend 16 million hours each day collecting water, amounting to 71 percent of all household water (UNICEF, 2016).

The concept of 'household time overhead' (Harvey and Taylor, 2000) is particularly relevant here. As relates to women, household time overhead' describes a situation where the amount of time that they spend on household chores is so high that it presents a full-time occupation. A consequence of these high housework burdens is that women have limited opportunities to engage in paid work and earn income, a situation which can limit their bargaining and decision-making power within the household as noted by Goldin (2021). Furthermore, when women are fully engaged in the business of domestic and care work, there are reduced opportunities for training and educational pursuits. The burdens of childcare and domestic responsibilities also cut into the time women could spend on paid work, a concept known as "time-related underemployment" (ILO, 2016), which can ultimately influence the overall gender pay gap. This narrative feeds into a broader scholarly work by Sharpe (2016;2002) and Nelson

(2006) which allude to the critical role household structure, gender roles, and home production play in the determination of women's labour market outcomes.

Women's disproportionate childcare and domestic workloads may, therefore, contribute in significant ways to the 'feminization of poverty'. Although this is often observed in many countries from the Global South, around the world, including Ghana, recent studies, including Banks (2020), highlights a more general burden faced by black women, raising questions about the specific nature of black women's experiences.

In general, though, a virtual cycle between domestic work burdens and women's bargaining status is evident. As noted by Nieuwenhuis *et al* (2018) women continue to take on the bulk of domestic and care work, they have fewer opportunities for paid work and resource accumulation. With lower access to resources, they have lower decision-making abilities within their households, which likely perpetuates an unequal distribution of domestic work within their households. Research, in most countries in the Global North settings, have examined whether higher earnings by women could encourage greater involvement by male partners' in household duties through bargaining mechanisms. According to bargaining models, which form the basis for household decision-making in modern economics, greater resource ownership strengthens one's bargaining position and increases his/her power to make social and economic decisions within the household. The link between women's higher earnings and their participation in domestic work is therefore an empirical question, and one that we explore comprehensively in this research.

The growing body of research in this area, largely conducted in countries from the Global North, has produced important theories about the nature of the association between women's monetary resources and their carrying out of domestic labour. While some researchers (e.g., Gupta, 2007) find that women's absolute earnings are important correlates of their domestic work (i.e. the autonomy hypothesis), others (e.g., Killewald and Gough, 2010) argue that women's earnings, compared to their husbands, is a more important factor (i.e. relative resource dependence and gender display hypotheses). In this paper, we test these theories in Ghana, using the Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey (GSEPS) and a random effects model specification.

The specific research questions to be examined are the following:

1. How much time is spent on childcare and domestic work by women and men in Ghanaian households over time?

2. What is the effect of men's and women's absolute earnings on women's domestic work hours?
3. What are the effects of the relative share of women's earnings on time spent on domestic work?

The research makes a number of contributions to the existing literature. First, despite the burgeoning literature on 'doing gender', very little has been done (if any) on the effect of women's absolute and relative earnings on household division of labour from the Global South context, largely due to unavailability of time use and panel data for analysis purposes. In Ghana, there is some research on marriage, the distribution of responsibilities, and subjective wellbeing (Addai *et al.*, 2015), but no work has been done specifically addressing the three questions we seek to answer. For these reasons, this study makes an important contribution. Second, it is possible that high-earning wives spend less time in household labour not necessarily because of their greater earnings, but because women with high earnings have fixed, unobserved traits that are correlated with lower levels of domestic production, such as a lower preference for housework. Therefore, wives' earnings may give them autonomy to reduce their time in household labour. Using panel data, our research controls for such unobserved attributes of wives – an approach other notable studies (e.g. Wodon and Ying, 2010; Gupta, 2007) have not explored. The study aims to contribute to the body of research on domestic work and women's bargaining power. The results have implications for understanding the significance of women's own monetary resources, separate from their male partners. Based on the research findings, we make a number of policy recommendations to improve women's well-being. The rest of the article is divided into four sections, respectively examining domestic work and women's labour force participation in Ghana, description of the three main hypotheses, methodology and results.

## **2. Domestic work and women's labour force participation in Ghana**

In Ghana, as across the world, the burden of unpaid housework and care work is disproportionately borne by women and girls. This unequal distribution of housework and care work is one manifestation of gender inequality. Given the amounts of time and efforts that housework and childcare entail, members who engage in these activities have little time for paid work, leisure, learning, and other activities.

A number of theories, drawn from both sociology and economics, explain women's heavy domestic work burdens. These theories include socialist and

feminist approaches, which combine two feminist theories. The first, Marxist feminism, which posits that unpaid labour is a necessity for capitalism, and the second, Radical Feminist Theory, where the domination of women in unpaid work is simply because the labour distribution is performed by men in a patriarchal society (Ferguson, 2021). According to the Specialisation Perspective by Becker (1981), it is more efficient for women to specialise in household tasks because they have a biological advantage over men in terms of child rearing and nurturing and these are easier to combine with other related domestic responsibilities. The Time Availability Theory states that spouses who spend fewer hours in the paid labour force will spend more time on housework (Bianchi *et al.*, 2000). The high involvement of women in housework is assumed, therefore, to result from their low participation rate in the paid labour force, ignoring the potential of reverse causality and the intersectionality of social and economic forces (Browne and Sullivan, 2022).

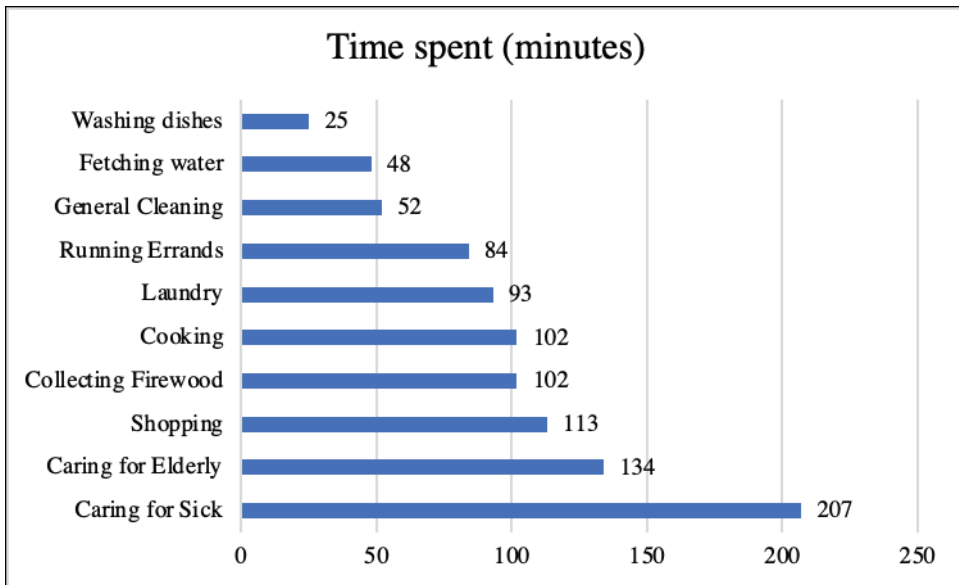
Being more comprehensive, the Economic Bargaining Model or Relative Resources perspective addresses these problems. According to this perspective, the allocation of housework reflects unequal power relations between men and women and the level of resources that each partner brings to the relationship determines how much labour is completed by each partner. The partner with fewer resources does more of the undesired domestic work. Finally, with the 'Doing Gender' and Gender Attitudes perspectives, housework is seen as a symbolic representation of gender relations and wives and husbands display their 'appropriate' gender roles through the amount of housework that they carry out.

Heavy housework burdens are a major barrier to Ghanaian women's ability to advance in their careers (Gyeke, 2013). Figure 1 summarises the forms of work performed by women within a 24-hour working day in 2014. This house work takes considerable amount of time, ranging from 25 minutes spent washing dishes on average, to 207 minutes spent caring for the sick. Caring for elders and the sick within the household appears to take up the most of women's time spent in the household.

A major concern with women's heavy work burdens is that it leaves insufficient time to engage meaningfully in gainful market work. In Ghana, some 90 percent of currently employed individuals work in the informal economy with males accounting for 45.1 percent and females, 54.9 percent (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016). As is well known (Anyidoho and Steel, 2016; Obeng-Odoom, 2011) work conditions in the informal economy in Ghana are harsh and the

economic activities of women tend to be recurrently under attack when city authorities seek to ‘modernise’ markets. Reflexively, formal, paid employment is more secure and safer (Owoo and Lambon-Quayefio, 2021), but a higher percentage (27.1%) of males than females (14.5%) work as paid employees in Ghana. Females are more likely than men to fall within the contributing family worker status. Paid employees in the country earn an average monthly income of GH¢898 (USD150), with males (GH¢1,011) (USD168.5) earning more than females (GH¢715; USD 119.2) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016).

FIGURE 1: FORMS OF WORK PERFORMED BY WOMEN WITHIN A 24-HOUR WORKING DAY



Source: Author constructions from 2014 Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey.

### 3. The hypotheses

Earlier theories on household production conceptualised men and women as collaborative players pursuing a common objective, which is the maximization of household wellbeing (Becker, 1981). Based on beliefs about their respective skills, women would perform domestic activities while men would be engaged in the labour market. Structural and feminist critiques of these models have argued that men and women could have differing interests and capabilities (England and Budig, 1998; Blumberg and Coleman, 1989). The continued overrepresentation of women in domestic work may therefore be attributable more to women’s weaker bargaining positions, due to their typically lower earnings,

and not as a result of a desire to cooperate toward maximizing the household's welfare. The basic idea is that the more a person depends financially on their partner, the less power that person has in making social and economic decisions in the household. Recent research (e.g., Arthur-Holmes and Busia, 2020; Buvinić *et al.*, 2016; Doss, 2013; Killewald and Gough, 2010; Gupta, 2007) has therefore focused on the importance of women's earnings in improving their bargaining power and decision-making outcomes within the household.

### *3.1. The autonomy hypothesis*

The autonomy hypothesis posits that women with lower earnings, in absolute terms, will take on greater amounts of housework. The autonomous effect of women's earnings on their household outcomes is explained by their enhanced abilities to afford substitutes for childcare and domestic labour.

In the United States, Killewald and Gough (2010) found that wives' earnings are significantly negatively related to their time in housework. Other authors have found similar results (Gupta, 2007). Gupta and Ash (2008) used data from the second wave of the US's National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) conducted between 1992 and 1994. The dependent variable was weekly hours spent on four tasks: cleaning, doing dishes, cooking, and laundry. Annual labour earnings of each member of the couple from the year preceding the survey were collected. Their results revealed that women's earnings are negatively associated with their housework hours, independent of their partners' earnings and their shares of couples' total earnings.

Although the hypothesis also predicts that higher absolute earnings of male partners will lead to a reduction in women's time spent in domestic work, the effect of women's own absolute earnings is expected to be greater (Gupta, 2007, 2006). Gupta (2006) showed that the effect of women's own earnings on their housework time is much greater than that of their husbands' earnings. Using data on the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), conservative models initially suggest that the negative link between women's housework and their own earnings is two to three times greater than that with their partners. In a more complete model, they found that the association with partners' earnings was not statistically significant. The author concludes that women do not benefit much, as far as housework is concerned, from their male partners' income.

Household survey data collected in Ghana by Kabeer *et al.* (2013) as part of a three country case study on women's empowerment, revealed that women's autonomous earnings have significant effect on their unpaid work activities.



In particular, Ghanaian women in the formal economy who relatively earned higher incomes than women in other categories of work, were found to hold responsibilities for fewer household chores. Women in agriculture-based employment earned least and shoulder a larger share of household work than other occupational groups.

A well-documented mechanism for the inverse relationship between wives' housework hours and their earnings has been the outsourcing of housework (Craig *et al.*, 2016; Gonalons-Pons, 2015; Risman, 2011; Gupta, 2006). By this argument, women who experience increases in their own earnings reduce their housework time by purchasing market substitutes or engaging domestic workers for their household labour (Killewald and Gough, 2010). Killewald and Gough (2010) used data from the 1976 – 2003 waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and employed fixed effects models to examine whether increases in wives' earnings allowed them to forego or outsource some domestic tasks. The results show that wives' earnings are significantly and negatively related to their time in housework. It is expected that hiring domestic workers could reduce time used in housework and ease pressure on subjective time (Risman, 2011). It is perceived by some authors (Gupta and Ash, 2008; Gupta 2007, 2006) that high-earning wives can purchase market substitutes for their housekeeping services such that although their husbands' housework hours do not increase that much, they are able to devote less time for housework. For instance, Wing (1994) reports that women's wages are significantly positively related to the probability of hiring domestic workers in Hong Kong, concluding that domestic workers and a woman's own time are substitutes in the household production process. Cohen (1998) finds similar results in the US, but also reports a weaker positive relation with husbands' earnings. Surveys about the use of domestic services in France indicate that the majority of respondents would like to hire domestic services from the market but do not do so mainly because of income (budgetary) constraints (Flipo, 1996).

In Ghana and many African countries, the changing nature of family arrangements presents a strong rationale for engaging domestic workers. In the past, the context of extended family systems ensured that domestic work and care responsibilities for children were shared among family members (mainly women) relieving working women in this regard (Tsikata, 2009).

### *3.2. The relative resource hypothesis*

The relative resource theory proposes a negative relationship between a partner's share of the couple's total income and the time the partner spends on



domestic work. The partner with fewer resources compensates the other by taking on more housework. The observed gender gap in housework from both Global North and South settings may therefore be explained as a consequence of the economic dependence of women on men, given that wives' earnings are typically lower than their male partners. If housework is assumed to be an unwanted activity for both women and their male partners, then, all other things constant, the one with more resources may be expected to perform less housework than his/her partner (Evertsson and Neramo, 2004; Bittman *et al.*, 2003). Under the relative resource hypothesis therefore, women's time spent in domestic work should decrease whenever their earnings rise relative to their male partner's, as more resources give them more power to negotiate smaller household responsibilities (Baxter *et al.*, 2008).

### *3.3. The compensatory gender display hypothesis*

Despite the existence of autonomy theories which predict a negative association between women's earnings and their involvement in domestic work, gender-based theories seek to explain why women who earn much more or as much as their spouses continue to be burdened by relatively more housework (Lausten, 2006; Evertsson & Neramo, 2004; Bittman *et al.*, 2003; Pyke, 1994). When the idea of non-rational influences on human behaviour such as childhood socialization and gendered norms are considered, it becomes more likely that a woman's earnings do not automatically give her control of household decisions nor reduce her time for housework (Engle *et al.*, 1999; Pyke, 1994). A woman's earnings, wealth and resources (relative to those of her husband) can, therefore, only have a limited effect on decision making power (Connelly and Kimmel, 2009).

The gender display/ deviance theory of housework was proposed by West and Zimmerman (1987), who argued that individuals do gender through their daily behaviours such as domestic work particularly when relating with the opposite gender. According to the compensatory gender display or gender deviance hypothesis, women whose earnings are greater than their male partners' will adopt a gender-traditional division of household labour and exaggerate their housework functions in the face of their gender-atypical relative incomes. Therefore, married women whose earnings exceed their husbands' will do more housework compared to other women, and men whose earnings are unusually low, compared to their spouses', will do less housework than other men.

Using data from six countries (i.e. Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, India, Kenya and Nigeria), for example, Simister (2013) finds that as a wife earned a larger

fraction of household earnings, the husband initially took on a larger fraction of the housework but as she earned almost all household income, he reduced his fraction of housework. The core implication of the gender deviance hypothesis is the claim that women who earn more than their partners will attempt to neutralize their deviance from societal norms and expectations (which expect male partners to be the primary breadwinners) by doing more housework than they would have if they were not earning much more than their partners (Evertsson and Nermo, 2004).

A study by Anyidoho and Ampofo (2015) on the work experience of women in the Ghanaian banking sector suggests that despite their busy schedule on their paid work, gendered roles and norms continue to require of them to come home to their other jobs as caregivers for which they usually have sole responsibility. Thus, the authors conclude that although time-use in the work place may have reduced between women and men, the gap is still large against women for domestic and care work.

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1. Data*

The data used for the analyses is the Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey (GSEPS). Two waves of the data are available – the first wave of data collection took place over a 6-month period (November 2009 to April 2010); the second wave started in 2014 and was completed in 2015. The survey provides regionally representative data for the then 10 regions of Ghana<sup>1</sup>. In total, 5010 households from 334 Enumeration Areas (EAs) were sampled. Fifteen households were then selected from each of the EAs. The number of EAs for each region was proportionately allocated based on the estimated 2009 population share for each region. EAs for Upper East Region and Upper West Region, which have relatively smaller population sizes, were over-sampled to allow for a reasonable number of households to be interviewed in these regions. The GSEPS is ideal for the examination of these relationships due to its panel nature and also because time-use information was collected in both waves. In this study, we define domestic work as the total time spent engaging in a series of related activities within a 24-hour period on a typical working day.

With respect to domestic work, each household head, the first spouse and one other household member over the age of 12 (chosen at random) was asked

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<sup>1</sup> Six (6) additional regions were created in 2018.

to answer questions on 11 domestic activities that they perform on a typical working day. These questions include the amount of time spent collecting firewood, fetching water, going to the market, running other errands, doing the laundry, cleaning, cooking, taking care of elders, taking care of the sick, doing the dishes and taking primary care of children. The inclusion of childcare in measuring total domestic work is consistent with other research (see Wodon and Ying, 2010; Costa *et al.*, 2009). The relevant survey question is:

*“On a typical day, does [Name] spend time [in a variety of activities. E.g. cooking, cleaning and other activities around the house]? If so, how much time does [Name] spend doing this activity (in hours and minutes)?”*

The main explanatory variable is the monthly earnings of men and women partners. Earnings are calculated for individuals in paid- and self-employment. The information on women and men's absolute earnings facilitates the test of the autonomy hypothesis, as shown in equation (1) in the methodology section below. Following Davis and Greenstein (2004), women's share of couple's earnings will be used to test the relative resource and compensatory gender display hypotheses. In order to examine the effect of relative spousal earnings on domestic work, the analyses are restricted to dual earner, married/cohabiting partners. We follow existing specifications in the literature for relative resource and compensatory gender displays by including both linear and quadratic forms of women's relative earnings (Gupta, 2007; Greenstein, 2000).

The data contains other variables that are important for the present research focus. A number of control variables are included in the analyses including the presence of children in the household (i.e., to control for life-cycle effects where the presence of children increases women's household time) (Bianchi *et al.*, 2000; Baxter *et al.*, 2008). Controls for ages of men and women partners, as well as the year of the survey are also included. Other controls include the education status of women and men partners, given that more educated couples have been found to be more egalitarian (Baxter *et al.*, 2008; Presser, 1994). Regional and rural/urban controls are also included. The analyses are conducted at the couple level and comprise 500 observation points.

#### *4.2. Empirical specification*

Following Gupta (2007, 2006), the autonomy hypothesis is specified empirically as a linear relationship between wives' absolute earnings and their time spent in housework. A Hausman test was run to determine the appropriate form of specification – fixed or random effects. Test results indicated suitability of the

latter specification. The random effects model is set out as follows:

$$W\_DW_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_w W\_Earn_{it} + \alpha_m M\_Earn_{it} + \gamma_1 X_{it} + \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

In this model,  $W\_DW_{it}$  refers to time spent in domestic work for woman  $i$  at time  $t$ .  $W\_Earn_{it}$  is a variable for absolute earnings of women, while  $M\_Earn_{it}$  is the variable for absolute earnings of men. According to the ‘autonomy’ argument (and following Killewald and Gough, 2010), as women earn more, they do less housework. A negative value of  $\alpha_w$  would provide some evidence in favour of this hypothesis. Additionally, in the autonomy hypothesis, it is often expected that  $\alpha_w > \alpha_m$  (Gupta, 2006). The set of control variables is represented as  $X_{it}$ , all of which vary across individuals and some of which vary across time. Included in this vector are age and education of couples, presence of children, urban/rural locality, etc.

Although information on domestic workers are often included in other studies, these household members represent 0.02% of the data (i.e. 22 observations) and are therefore excluded. We instead use the number of adult women present in the household as a proxy for additional household help. We also distinguish between older and younger children in the household as the former may also be helpful in carrying out domestic activities as well, consistent with existing literature (Stewart, 2021; Tetteh, 2011).  $\mu_i$  is the random effect;  $\varepsilon_{it}$  is the idiosyncratic error term for each individual and time period.

In order to test the relative resource/ economic dependency hypothesis, we include controls for women’s relative share of earnings (i.e., ratio of woman’s earnings to the sum of couple’s earnings; consistent with Davis and Greenstein, 2004) in the random effects model. According to the relative resource or economic dependency theory, the partner who contributes proportionally less to the household income does more housework. Following Aassve (2014), the model is specified as follows:

$$W\_DW_{it} = \alpha_w W\_Earn_{it} + \alpha_m M\_Earn_{it} + \alpha Earn\_Share_{it} + \gamma_1 X_{it} + \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

As described above,  $Earn\_Share$  is constructed as a ratio of wife’s earnings to total couple’s earnings. According to the ‘relative resource’ hypothesis, when women’s relative share of earnings increases, they devote less time to domestic work.  $W\_DW_{it}$  is as defined above. A negative value for  $\alpha$  in the wife’s specification would indicate evidence in favour of this hypothesis for Ghana.

Following Aassve (2014) and Gupta (2007), in order to examine the evidence for compensatory gender display, a quadratic term,  $Earn\_Share_{it}^2$  is included in the panel regression specification:

$$W\_DW_{it} = \alpha_w W\_Earn_{it} + \alpha_m M\_Earn_{it} + \alpha Earn\_Share_{it} + \beta Earn\_Share_{it}^2 + \gamma_1 X_{it} + \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

Evidence for the compensatory gender display hypothesis would be apparent if  $\alpha < 0$  and significant, and the  $\beta > 0$  and significant. Therefore, women who earn more than their partners do more housework than women who out-earn their husbands by less. According to the ‘compensatory gender display’ argument, women who earn more than their partners end up taking up more housework in order to ‘neutralize’ this gender ‘deviance’.

## 5. Results and discussions

This section comprises two parts – the first part provides descriptive statistics of the study data using the unimputed data; the second part provides results from the regression models 1, 2 and 3 specified above.

### 5.1. Descriptive statistics

The first research objective is to determine the amount of time spent on childcare and domestic work by couples in Ghanaian households and assess how this division of work has changed over time. Figure 2 illustrates this using data from the analytic sample.

Childcare is divided into two types – primary and secondary childcare, following Craig *et al.* (2012). Primary childcare is described as the time spent exclusively supervising children while not performing any other domestic activity. This includes helping with homework, teaching, storytelling, playing outside, and giving a bath. The relevant survey question is as follows:

*“Does [Name] spend time caring for children while not doing any other activity? If so, how much time does [Name] spend doing this activity (in hours and minutes).”*

Secondary childcare is described as the time spent performing a number of daily activities, in addition to reading, watching TV and/or listening to the radio, with a child less than 15 years of age being present. The relevant survey question is:

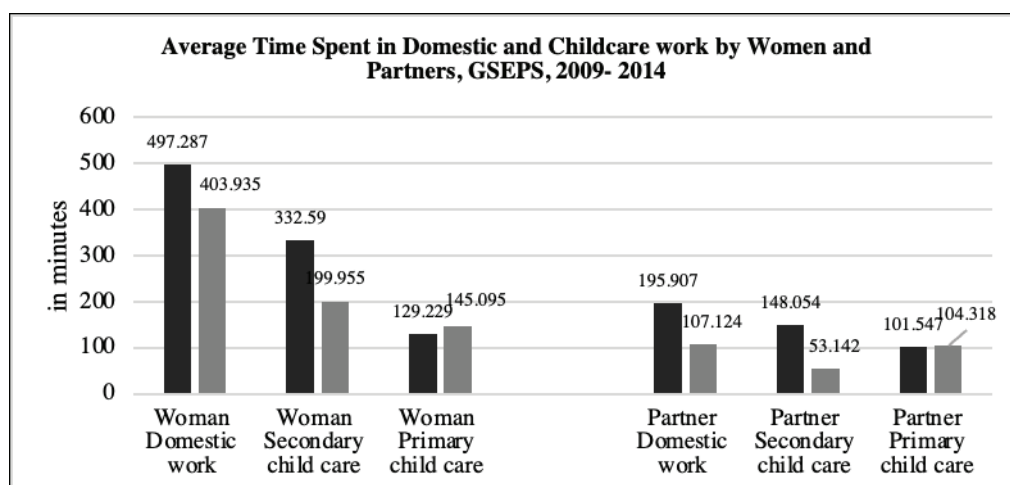
*“Does [Name] undertake this activity whilst a child (<15years) [Name] is caring for is with [Name]?”*

As discussed earlier, domestic work in this paper includes performing housework and primary care of children, consistent with existing literature.

Women generally spend more time in domestic and childcare (primary and secondary) work, compared to their male partners. Women spend almost 500 minutes, 333 minutes and 129 minutes in a typical working day on domestic work, secondary childcare and primary childcare, respectively; compared to male partners' 196 minutes, 148 minutes and 102 minutes, respectively.

There are some similarities in trend between men and women – the amount of time that each dedicates to both domestic work and secondary childcare has decreased between 2009 and 2014. Women's time spent in domestic work and secondary childcare decreased from 500 minutes and 333 minutes, respectively in 2009, to 404 minutes and 200 minutes in 2014. Similarly, partner's time spent in domestic work and secondary childcare decreased from 196 minutes and 148 minutes, respectively in 2009, to 107 minutes and 53 minutes in 2014.

FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF DOMESTIC AND CHILDCARE WORK BETWEEN GHANAIAAN COUPLES



Source: Author constructions from 2009 and 2014 Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey.

The amount of time spent in primary childcare has however increased between women and men from 2009 to 2014. The average time spent in primary childcare by women increased from 129 minutes in 2009 to 145 minutes in 2014. For men, the time spent in primary childcare also increased, although less strikingly, from 102 minutes to 104 minutes within the period. Differences between men and women for all categories of domestic and childcare in each year are statistically significant at least at the 1% level.

Table 1 provides summary statistics of other study variables for each year of the survey. As mentioned above, the research focuses on dual-earner couples and includes earnings from individuals who are either paid (i.e. salaries) – or self-employed (profits from enterprise). Women earn less than their male counterparts, although average earnings have increased for both women and their partners between 2009 and 2014. The share of women's income is, on average, about 35% of total spousal earnings. This has increased between 2009 and 2014. Self-employment is more prominent among women. About 20% of women in the sample are paid employees, while 80% are self-employed. This is compared to about 60% of male partners who are paid employees and 40% who are self-employed.

Information is provided on a number of technologies that may be expected to facilitate household chores and reduce the time spent in these activities. A larger percentage of households own these technologies between 2009 to 2014. Additionally, access to water for household use has improved over the period. The average woman in the sample in 2009 is almost 37 years old while her partner is 43 years. Couples have, on average, almost 2 children (under 15 years old) resident in the household. A smaller proportion of women, compared to their partners, report that they have ever attended school. The percentage of both educated women and men increased between 2009 and 2014. About 16% of the couples in the sample are poor in 2009, although this declined to about 9% by 2014.

Although some households report having domestic workers, this makes up only 0.02% of the analytical sample and this data is excluded from the analyses. We, however, include a control for the number of adult women in the household as these women may assist with childcare and/or domestic work. Almost half of couples are resident in urban areas. Regional distribution of couples is also summarized in Table 1.



TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, GSEPS, 2009 &amp; 2014

Variables	2009		2014	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Female earnings per month (Ghc)	90.94	134.48	260.08	951.67
Male earnings per month (Ghc)	253.18	600.38	641.73	1785.38
Women relative earnings	0.35	0.28	0.36	0.30
% of female employees (vs. self-employed)	0.20	0.40	0.18	0.39
% of partner employees (vs. self-employed)	0.59	0.49	0.60	0.49
Household has a stove (=1)	0.28	0.45	0.56	0.50
Household has a bicycle, motor, car and/or truck (=1)	0.36	0.48	0.44	0.50
Household has a blender (=1)	0.15	0.36	0.31	0.46
Distance to water (metres)	1919.44	12360.93	88.72	224.89
Woman ever attended school	0.74	0.44	0.85	0.36
Partner ever attended school	0.87	0.34	0.93	0.25
Woman age in years	37.20	9.67	39.56	9.02
Partner age in years	42.78	10.7	45.18	9.65
Household is poor (vs. non-poor)	0.16	0.36	0.09	0.28
Number of 0- 4 years	0.70	0.77	0.57	0.73
Number of children 5- 9 years	0.68	0.75	0.75	0.77
Number of children 10-14 years	0.55	0.79	0.60	0.76
Number of adult women in the household	1.27	0.56	1.37	0.65
Urban residence	0.58	0.49	0.69	0.46
Western region	0.12	0.32	0.10	0.30
Central region	0.16	0.36	0.09	0.28
Greater Accra region	0.17	0.37	0.23	0.42
Volta region	0.05	0.22	0.08	0.28
Eastern region	0.08	0.28	0.11	0.31
Ashanti region	0.17	0.38	0.23	0.42
Brong Ahafo region	0.15	0.36	0.07	0.26
Northern region	0.07	0.26	0.06	0.23
Upper East region	0.02	0.15	0.04	0.19
Upper West region	0.01	0.11	0	0
Observations		251		252

Source: Authors' estimates based on GSEPS Data.

### 5.3. Regression results and discussions

Table 2 shows results of regressions of women's domestic work on earnings and a series of woman, partner and household characteristics. Controls for

domestic technology are also included. Each of the hypotheses are tested (i.e., autonomy, relative resource and gender deviance) with controls for nature of work included in the second model specification.

TABLE 2: TEST REGRESSION OF WOMEN'S DOMESTIC WORK ON EARNINGS AND OTHER VARIABLES

	Autonomy Hypothesis		Relative Resource Hypothesis		Gender deviance Hypothesis	
	I	II	I	II	I	II
Woman earnings	-0.03* (-1.95)	-0.03* (-1.75)	-0.02 (-1.20)	-0.02 (-1.13)	-0.02 (-1.07)	-0.02 (-1.04)
Partner earnings	0.01 (1.50)	0.01 (1.51)	0.01 (1.11)	0.01 (1.19)	0.01 (0.91)	0.01 (1.02)
Woman share of couple earnings	-	-	-83.13** (-1.99)	-70.59* (-1.67)	-336.41** (-2.46)	-274.64* (-1.92)
Woman share of couple earnings sq	-	-	-	-	267.95* (1.94)	213.80 (1.49)
Woman employee	-	-73.49** (-2.45)	-	-60.52** (-1.98)	-	-48.03 (-1.52)
Partner employee	-	24.27 (1.01)	-	17.35 (0.69)	-	17.80 (0.71)
Stove	-45.50 (-1.58)	-44.97 (-1.55)	-40.85 (-1.38)	-40.16 (-1.35)	-42.99 (-1.45)	-42.50 (-1.43)
Vehicle	-13.88 (-0.54)	-16.51 (-0.65)	-16.56 (-0.63)	-18.44 (-0.70)	-20.42 (-0.78)	-20.99 (-0.80)
Blender	33.38 (1.05)	42.57 (1.33)	37.31 (1.14)	44.20 (1.34)	36.66 (1.12)	42.24 (1.28)
Distance to water (m)	0.00** (2.47)	0.00** (2.53)	0.00*** (2.68)	0.00*** (2.70)	0.00*** (2.74)	0.00*** (2.75)
Woman education	-36.19 (-1.09)	-37.58 (-1.14)	-33.62 (-1.00)	-33.93 (-1.01)	-29.78 (-0.89)	-31.22 (-0.93)
Partner education	72.75* (1.70)	67.42 (1.58)	123.19*** (2.81)	118.00*** (2.67)	121.88*** (2.79)	117.19*** (2.66)
Woman age	-2.22 (-0.87)	-2.05 (-0.81)	-3.47 (-1.31)	-3.34 (-1.26)	-3.39 (-1.29)	-3.29 (-1.25)
Partner age	0.27 (0.12)	-0.09 (-0.04)	1.26 (0.53)	0.97 (0.41)	1.10 (0.47)	0.89 (0.37)
Poor household	30.29 (0.83)	29.62 (0.82)	10.92 (0.29)	9.07 (0.24)	13.91 (0.38)	12.21 (0.33)
Number of children (0-4 yrs)	2.24 (0.13)	1.36 (0.08)	5.56 (0.32)	4.98 (0.29)	6.28 (0.36)	5.63 (0.32)
Number of children (10-14 yrs)	9.46 (0.62)	7.44 (0.49)	19.71 (1.24)	17.89 (1.13)	21.00 (1.33)	19.18 (1.21)
No. of adult women	-13.94 (-0.70)	-11.93 (-0.60)	-8.10 (-0.39)	-6.27 (-0.30)	-2.72 (-0.13)	-2.34 (-0.11)

Urban	-60.18** (-2.22)	-59.01** (-2.18)	-71.03** (-2.53)	-69.49** (-2.47)	-72.35*** (-2.59)	-70.71** (-2.53)
Wave (2009)	77.31*** (3.23)	79.83*** (3.35)	76.84*** (3.17)	79.06*** (3.26)	76.49*** (3.15)	78.08*** (3.21)
Regional controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<i>N</i>	503	503	467	467	467	467

*Note:* T- statistics in parenthesis: \*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Findings on the autonomy hypothesis: The autonomy hypothesis posits that while men and women's absolute earnings are associated with less time spent in domestic work and childcare by women, the effect of her own earnings are stronger. We find that in Ghana, women do reduce the amount of time spent in domestic work as their absolute earnings increase. A likely explanation for this is that the increased earnings may allow women to outsource domestic chores to domestic workers or purchase more domestic technology. The relationship between women's earnings and their housework is partially explained by the nature of work that they do. It is observed that women in paid employment positions do less housework and including this variable in the regression reduces the significance of the effect of absolute earnings on women's domestic work.

Following Killewald and Gough (2010), we control for the non-linear relationship between wives' absolute earnings and their housework time in alternative specifications (results available upon request) but do not find any significant associations. Although the autonomy theory posits a negative relationship between men's earnings and women's time spent in household work (Gupta, 2006), there are no significant effects of partners' absolute earnings on women's childcare and domestic work.

Findings on relative resource hypothesis: According to the relative resource theory, the more the woman contributes to the household income, the less housework she does and the more housework her partner does. Domestic work divisions are assumed to result from negotiations between spouses grounded on relative measures of earnings, hence the more an individual earns, the less housework he or she does (e.g., Hersch & Stratton, 1994; Brines, 1993). We find evidence in support of the relative resource hypothesis in Ghana – women who have larger shares of spousal income appear to spend less time in domestic work. Risman (2011) explains that higher relative earnings by women may not necessarily imply that men are carrying out more housework. Given as we do not find any significant effects of women's earnings on Ghanaian men's

time spent in domestic work (results available upon request), it is difficult to attribute women's less time spent in domestic work to increased uptake by men. Rather, higher earning women may be able to afford more domestic technology and domestic help.

We also note that the nature of women's jobs explains part of the observed results, with the inclusion of the nature of work in the model reducing both the magnitude and significance of the initially observed relationship. This implies that, although paid employment is more lucrative than self-employment in Ghana (Oyenubi, 2019), the inflexible nature of paid positions may reduce a woman's ability to spend more time in domestic work.

Findings on gender deviance theory: Including a quadratic component of spousal earnings in the regressions, we find initial evidence of the gender deviance/neutralization theory for Ghana. When the nature of work is included in the regression, the quadratic term remains positive but is no longer significant.

Although not the focus of the paper, other findings are worthy of discussion. In a study by Addai *et al.* (2015), the authors argue that the traditional gender roles of women in Ghana have important implications for their well-being. Specifically, the authors find evidence of a negative relationship between marriage, and therefore, women's gendered role and happiness among females in Ghana.

Researchers have found that access to domestic technology and substitutes for housework may reduce the time women spend in domestic work (Killewald and Gough, 2010). This is consistent for Ghana – although the effect was small, increasing distance from water increased time spent on domestic work. Women whose partners were educated appeared to spend a lot more time in domestic work.

Results also indicate that women who are paid employees spend less time in domestic activities, compared to women who are self-employed. This is consistent with Craig *et al.* (2012), Gershuny *et al.* (2005) who find that women's domestic labour decreases with time spent in paid employment. Women and their partners who reside in urban Ghana appear to spend less time in domestic work, compared to their rural counterparts. Women also performed more domestic work in 2009, compared to 2014, indicating that less time is being spent by women carrying out these activities over time, controlling for other variables.

## **6. Conclusion**

Do married Ghanaian women's earnings relieve their childcare and domestic burdens or amplify it? Much of the work on the effect of women's earnings on household work is based on countries from the Global North. In this paper, we examine the evidence for three hypotheses (i.e., autonomy, relative resource and compensatory gender display/gender deviance) in a Global South context. Using two waves of the Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey (GSEPS) and a random effects regression model, we find that women reduce their time spent in domestic work with increases in their absolute earnings, consistent with the autonomy hypothesis. We also find evidence in support of the relative resource hypothesis, where women who have larger shares of spousal income appear to do less domestic work. Although initial evidence of the gender deviance hypothesis is found, effects are no longer significant once the nature of women's work is controlled for.

It is important to mention that, although the research establishes that a negative and non-linear relationship exists between wives' earnings and their housework time, we acknowledge that it is not possible for us to determine the causal mechanism that is responsible for this relationship. Wives may decrease their time in housework as their earnings rise either because they are outsourcing domestic labour to helpers or because they are foregoing housework without purchasing a substitute for their own time. The presence of panel data is however a major strength of this research as previous evaluations of these theories have not used longitudinal data that can control for the fact that couples in which the wife out-earns the husband may differ in systematic ways from other couples that affect their housework time. For example, in situations where wives out-earn their partners, these wives may also have high levels of energy and motivation that lead them to invest heavily in both market work and housework, or it may be the case that wives who are efficient in the labour force are less efficient at home, leading to high earnings but also long hours in housework. Similarly, examinations of the autonomy perspective have often used cross-sectional data (Gupta, 2007, 2006). The use of this cross-sectional data masks the possibility that high-earning wives spend less time in household labour not because of their earnings, but because these women with high earnings may have fixed, unobserved characteristics that are correlated with lower levels of domestic production, such as a greater aversion to housework. In this case, wives' earnings do not necessarily give them autonomy to reduce their time spent in domestic work and childcare, as the relationship is spurious. In our

analysis, the use of panel data helps to control for such unobserved attributes of wives. To the best of knowledge, this would be the first research of its kind for Ghana and is a significant step to encouraging more work in this area.

The contribution of women's domestic work in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes is often ignored despite the noted correlation between gender inequality in domestic work and female labour force participation. Greater understanding of the significance of women's own monetary resources, separate from their male partners, to observed asymmetries in bargaining and housework labour distribution would help to better inform development policies and interventions.

A limitation of the analysis is the relatively small sample size used as it may obscure significant associations that would otherwise be present. Nonetheless, this research represents the first attempt at exploring the association between women's earnings and their domestic work burdens and therefore contributes new knowledge to a subject research area that has been dominated by findings from the Global North.

A number of policy recommendations may follow from results of this research. First, there are indications that access to gainful employment and adequate earnings are important for reducing women's domestic work and childcare burdens. This is because it would allow the outsourcing of domestic work and childcare responsibilities. There should be greater inclusion of women in productive activities. Second, there should be increased provision of labour-saving technologies such as piped water, particularly in rural areas, which would reduce the time spent in activities such as fetching water. Third, there should be greater education and advocacy on women's burden of work in order to raise awareness of their burdens and contributions and also to encourage greater assistance and involvement of male partners. Fourth, while governments cannot force men to participate equally in housework and care responsibilities, there can be increased recognition of women's work within the household, with appropriate means of measuring/ capturing and compensating these contributions (Vastbist, 2010). Additionally, policies should be put in place to make it easier for women to balance their domestic responsibilities with their labour market work more efficiently – for example, public provision of affordable childcare, and child-friendly workspaces. Finally, as noted by Addai *et al.*, (2015), aside from exploring the relationship between the burden of domestic and care work on more objective outcomes such as earnings, the use of longitudinal data that documents subjective well-being indicators over a

period of time of will be complementary to the findings of the current study for effective public policy making.

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### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.



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