

Australian women are doing 50% more housework than men. It's creating 'volcanic levels of resentment'

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Which people in your house regularly do the following housework?
 - cook
 - clean
 - buy the weekly food
 - look after other family members, e.g. children or the elderly
2. Do you consider the distribution of housework in your family to be typical for where you live? Why / why not?
3. How has this distribution changed over the years? How should it change?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. burden | a. a boring task that you have to do |
| 2. chore | b. a feeling of anger about an unfair situation |
| 3. discrimination | c. a specific area of knowledge or activity |
| 4. division | d. hard physical or mental work that is done without receiving money |
| 5. domestic | e. social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women |
| 6. erupt | f. something related to the home and family relationships |
| 7. expectations | g. something that happens after something else |
| 8. flexible work | h. something unpleasant or difficult that you have to manage or think about |
| 9. gender norms | i. strong beliefs someone has about the appropriate way something should happen |
| 10. mental load | j. the cognitive and emotional work needed to manage a situation |
| 11. persist | k. the way something is separated among a group of people |
| 12. realm | l. to happen suddenly or violently |
| 13. resentment | m. unfair treatment of a person because of their sex, race, etc. |
| 14. subsequent | n. when an unpleasant feeling or situation continues to exist |
| 15. unpaid | o. work patterns that can change easily according to the situation |

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. According to traditional _____, boys like blue and girls like pink.
2. His boss agreed to a(n) _____ schedule so that he could look after his mother.
3. Neighbours called the police to try and stop a(n) _____ dispute.
4. Many small restaurants reduce costs by using family members as _____.
5. His partner felt a lot of _____ because he always had to travel for work.
6. The workers complained about the _____ of labour among staff.
7. There have been many ads on TV about ways to address racial _____.
8. To qualify for the final, the team had to win the _____ game.
9. You should contact your doctor if the cough _____.
10. After three days of peace, violence suddenly _____ last night.
11. As a child, I always had to do my _____ before I was allowed to go out.
12. Having to work and look after the family really added to her _____.
13. After working for the government for so long, she wanted a job outside of the political _____.
14. He hates having the financial _____ of his student loan.
15. Her family told her about their _____ that she should be single for a while after her divorce.

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Australia and New Zealand rank third highest globally for unpaid domestic work done by women, according to the UN data from 2023

Daisy Dumas

06 March, 2025

- 1 This International Women's Day, Meg's* life will feel no less chaotic than it does on any other day. Like her husband, the 43-year-old from Sydney works five days a week – but she also has a second job, freelancing in the evenings. They have three young children, a mortgage and no family in Australia. "I'm always whizzing around cleaning like a mad Tasmanian devil," the creative director says.
- 2 She is not alone. The latest Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (Hilda) survey shows that in 2022, men spent an average of 12.8 hours a week on housework – exactly the same amount as they did 20 years earlier – while women do 50% more (an average of 18.4 hours). All up, women had nearly two fewer hours a week for themselves than men and they're not OK with it.
- 3 Dr Inga Lass, the report's co-author and senior research fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, found that women found the division of unpaid labour was unfair and were less satisfied with their share than men. "I've got so used to doing housework on top of everything else that I'm just a well-oiled machine – that every now and then erupts into volcanic levels of resentment," Meg says.

Gender norms persist

- 4 "This is not a surprise to me," political economist Prof Elizabeth Hill says of the Hilda findings. She emphasises that, even when a woman was employed and her male partner was not, she still did most of the unpaid care.
- 5 There is another way of looking at the data however, says Peter Siminski of the University of Technology Sydney. We're doing less housework overall (thanks to technology and outsourcing) and the figures reflect a positive – if slow – narrowing of gender gaps around housework. Yet Siminski's own research, again, mirrors Hilda: how much we can earn does not impact how work is divided at home.
- 6 Gender norms do, Lass suggests. "I think it starts with how boys and girls are being raised, and what they're being taught."

- 7 As pervasive as our expectations – or those of our partners – is the structure of our labour markets, care systems, schools, workplace practices and policy settings, which, Hill says, presume that women are more interested in, and capable of, care and domestic labour than men.

Parenthood penalty

- 8 Australia and New Zealand is the third highest region for unpaid domestic work done by women, according to UN data from 2023. A 2024 report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies' Dr Jenny Baxter showed that in 78% of couple families in Australia, the mental load was always or usually carried by the mother. Hill's research found that the burden of care responsibilities fundamentally shaped women's daily lives and capacity to work.
- 9 The upshot is that both men and women miss out. There are known to be significant benefits for men who are involved in family care in terms of their health and wellbeing, says Hill. But when they do try to mix work and care, research shows they can face an economic penalty and discrimination in training and promotion opportunities. "We talk about the motherhood penalty – there seems to be the emergence of a kind of a parenthood penalty, and we need to push back against that really strongly," she says.

Work and home lives blurring

- 10 We have more efficiency-boosting technology, but our smartphones blur the lines between work and family time while turbocharging stress and pressure, says Dent. In 2002, housework was not interrupted by the patter of school WhatsApp updates. Up until having a baby, women do roughly the same share of housework and paid work as their male partners, then roles dramatically diverge. "Having babies just shifts the dynamic within couples so much. It puts women on this invisible back foot. You're at home all the time and that becomes your realm, so you start doing all the domestic chores," Meg says.

Call for more flexible work

- 11 The birth of a first child is what sets a household's patterns around care and housework. Hill says that in Nordic countries where there is a significant investment in non-gendered parental leave fathers who care for their infants continue to be involved closely in the care of their children in the subsequent years.

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Level 3: Advanced

- 11 Alongside an acceleration in investment into paid parental leave and childcare systems, Australia needs more good flexible work – jobs that involve training and career opportunities.

"We're heading in the right direction, but we need to go much faster, and we need to include all aspects of society," says Hill. Also, she says, "frankly, men need to step up".

* Name has been changed

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How many hours a week did Australian men spend on housework in 2002?
2. How many hours a week do Australian women have to themselves compared to Australian men?
3. What are the two factors helping people to do less housework now?
4. Why is it assumed that women are more interested in and capable of domestic labour than men?
5. In what percentage of Australian couples is the mental load carried by the father?
6. What are the benefits of being involved in family care for men?
7. Why does having children change the family dynamic so much for women?
8. How does investing in non-gendered parental leave affect the relationship between fathers and children?
9. What else should Australia benefit from apart from investing in paid parental leave and childcare systems?
10. What is meant by the conclusion 'frankly, men need to step up'?

b. List the steps that Australia should take to improve the situation for women.

4 Key language

a. Decide if the words in bold in these extracts from the article refer to the adjectives (A) or nouns (N).

1. Meg's life will feel no less **chaotic** than it does on any other day. _____
2. Women were less **satisfied** with their share than men. _____
3. We're doing less **housework** overall. _____
4. Women had nearly two fewer **hours** a week for themselves than men. _____
5. Expectations presume that women are more **interested** in the care and domestic labour than men. _____

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Level 3: Advanced

6. We have more efficiency-boosting **technology**. _____
7. As **pervasive** as our expectations are the structure of our labour markets. _____
8. Exactly the same **amount** as they did 20 years earlier. _____

b. Complete the sentences with the words from the box. You might have to change the form of the word.

are / were

as

do

feel

have

the same

1. She is _____ enthusiastic about the new flexible work schedule as her colleagues.
2. She is _____ less motivated by her job than before.
3. Women often _____ more responsibilities than men.
4. There are _____ number of train lines in the city despite the increase in population.
5. They _____ less able to spend time with their families.
6. He is now _____ more work despite not getting any more money.

c. Write three personalised sentences using the phrases below.

I have exactly the same amount of ...

I do less / more work now than ...

I am more / less interested in ...

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- We do much less housework now than in previous generations, so the difference between genders is less relevant now.
- The only path to true equality of gender is for women to be equal to men in every single realm including professional and domestic.
- Women will always be the main child carer, so therefore, it is logical for them to be involved in tasks involving the home and family.

6 In your own words

a. Plot the number of hours that different male and female members of your family spend on chores. Compare the time spent across genders and across the ages of family members. Use these examples to guide your ideas.

- Going shopping for house essentials, e.g. food, cleaning products, etc.
- Cooking meals
- Cleaning the house
- Maintaining the house, e.g. gardening, house repairs, painting, etc.
- Buying clothes for the family
- Washing and ironing clothes
- Caring for the family physically or emotionally
- Checking the family's financial situation
- Observing important dates for the family, e.g. deadlines, school trips, birthdays, etc.

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- b. Write a report on your findings. Mention the differences between genders and between age. Explain what you think the significance of these differences might be and how to correct for any potential problems. Here are the kind of phrases that might help you in your report.

_____ is less aware of the important times for the family such as ...

_____ has a bigger mental load because ...

_____ spends more time on _____ but less time on ...

The division of labour is the same now as ...

There is / was a bigger expectation for _____ to do more / less ...

It seems that _____ is doing more / less housework overall.