

Increasing Information Transparency Reduces Gender Inequalities at Home in a COVID-19 Lockdown Experiment

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STATUS: Complementary analyses in progress; Manuscript in prep.

TARGET JOURNAL: Nature: Human Behaviour

Abstract. Gender inequality in division of domestic labor at *home* greatly contributes to gender differences in career trajectories at *work*, a phenomenon recently illustrated by the COVID19 crisis and its disproportionate impact on female professionals, compelled to handle the lion's share of extra domestic duties during the pandemic's lockdowns. Although past academic work has greatly contributed to our understanding of the root causes underlying these enduring disparities, its emphasis on deeply ingrained socialization processes and persistently imbalanced power dynamics has offered little practical solutions to address prejudicial gender dynamics at home. To remedy the issue, we reframed division of domestic labor as a free rider problem between romantic partners and tested the benefit of an information transparency intervention in a longitudinal field experiment set during UK's national lockdown of Summer 2020. For two weeks, 82 heterosexual, dual earner couples provided daily accounts ($N = 2,137$ observations) of their individual activities (e.g., work, cleaning, laundry, childcare, leisure). At the end of Week 1, participants—initially unaware of the true purpose of the study—received a customized intervention report graphically summarizing both their own and their partner's contribution to their household's domestic labor over the past week. Male partners—who generally contributed the least in Week 1 (pre-intervention)—increased their effort in Week 2 (post-intervention), and female partners—who generally contributed the most in Week 1—reduced their effort over that same period, narrowing down the gap of contribution to domestic labor. Furthermore, both male and female partners reported less work-family conflict post-intervention, offering early evidence of the benefits of addressing gendered dynamics at home to reduce gender inequalities at work. This study constitutes, as far as we know, the first intervention to ever attempt—and succeed—at reducing uneven contributions to domestic labor, a plight that negatively impacts women's wellbeing, relationship satisfaction, and career outcomes every day, all around the world.