

**Thematic Session**  
**Gender Inequality in Housework**

**Is Gender Inequality in Housework  
Being Resolved in Korea?**

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As a space that involves our daily life activities, home is the basic unit where we provide for, take care of, educate, and protect our family members every day. Housework is conducted repeatedly every day to help family members continue their daily life. Someone is required to do the housework to maintain the daily life of the family members at home, the private space. We have sustained our daily life thanks to someone who has repetitively done the housework at home every day. The daily life of humanity has been possible through the hidden labor of 'daily housework.' Housework is important in that it enables us to retain our daily life while serving as a basis to realize a decent life as a human being. Although housework is a private and unpaid labor at home, it deserves to be discussed as a social labor in the context of social agenda, considering the significance and the value of housework. Among the categories of housework, caring for family members has a significant value and meaning as one of the key elements that make our society sustainable. We all depend on someone's care to continue living our life. Human dependence on caring is inevitably 'universal'. This is why 'caring' is a public agenda that requires social measures (Hyun-Ah Lee et al. 2002).

The dichotomous model of gender roles has been solidified since the industrialization. This model defined men as breadwinner and women as homemaker, taking women's unpaid housework at home for granted and making women's social status lower. Although the increase in women's economic participation has brought changes to the traditional model of male breadwinner and dual-income households have increased, 'gender inequality' still exists in our society where women are considered mainly responsible for housework and care work. According to a recent Time Use Survey (Statistics Korea, 2020), a rapidly increasing percentage of Korean people (64.3% in 2014 → 72.8% in 2019) opposes the gender stereotype of "male breadwinner and female homemaker." In reality, however, there is still a significant gender gap in the hours of housework between women (3.13 hours) and men (56 minutes), where women spend four times more hours for housework than men.

The 20 years of Time Use Survey results (Statistics Korea, 2020) show that, overall, women's housework hours have decreased and men's housework hours have increased and that the percentage of those who reject traditional gender stereotypes significantly increased especially among younger population in their 30s (68.4% in 2014 → 81.6% in 2019). The results of this Time Use Survey imply a possibility that the gender inequality in housework could be alleviated. In fact, the analysis on married men's generation-specific housework hours based on the housework

participation hypothesis (Hyun-Ah Lee · Joo-Hee Kim, 2021) shows that married men among Generation Y, who are also called the millennials, participate in housework when they are required to do so or when they have available time to do so at home, rather than depending on their gender role attitude or economic efficiency. This outcome shows a clear difference between the millennial generation and their parents' generation (baby boomer generation) or the transitional generation (Generation X).

While focusing on the decrease of gender inequality in housework among younger generations, we conducted a latent class analysis on the types of housework participation among men and women in their 30s. According to the results of this analysis, a large proportion of women 'participate in the overall housework categories' including cooking, managing clothing, cleaning the house, purchasing daily necessities, and managing other home affairs. However, a high proportion of men 'do not participate in the overall housework categories' or 'participate only in cleaning the house.' This analysis shows that gender gap in housework still exists even among younger generations, who reject the traditional gender stereotypes and consider their spouse an equal partner, and that the gender inequality in housework continues to exist regardless of generations (Hyun-Ah Lee · Soon-Beom Kwon, 2023). Moreover, women have been burdened with heavier housework and care responsibilities at home since Covid 19, which further widened the gender gap in housework (Hyun-Ah Lee, 2021).

The case example of Vietnam (Pham Thu Hien, Gender Specialist) also shows that the gender norms and inequality in terms of housework have not much changed for the last 10 years. Her presentation demonstrated multiple evidence that women experience social stereotypes regarding their responsibility for housework and that there is gender inequality in terms of the hours spent for housework between men and women. Considering that the situation in Vietnam is not much different from that of Korea, we feel the necessity for a global solidarity to address the common global problem of gender inequality in housework. In this regard, I agree with the speaker's proposal that the government should facilitate and provide public care services and address the perception and distribution of unpaid care work as a main policy agenda. This is not just the case of Vietnam.

Although Korea established gender equality-related legal basis ahead of other

countries and has implemented various programs and policies to support housework and care work, the gender inequality in housework is yet to be improved in Korea. 'Domestic purpose benefit' is recently being discussed in Korea, as a way of recognizing and compensating for the social value of housework under an institutional policy. If 'Gwangju Domestic Purpose Benefit' is created and adopted, it will become Korea's first domestic purpose benefit system. Establishing an economic compensation system for unpaid housework will provide an opportunity to assess and recognize the productive contribution and roles of women who have taken on the responsibility for unpaid housework so far. Domestic purpose benefit bears a significant meaning in that it serves as a starting point to enhance women's status in the society. As suggested in presentation by Gyoung-Rae Kim, the President of Gwangju Foundation for Women & Family, however, it is necessary to closely review the potential beneficiaries of the benefit, adequate payment level, and the effect of such benefit payment, before implementing any domestic purpose benefit policy. Regarding the effect of the benefit payment, in particular, we need to look at the examples of other cash allowance policies. In the case of child care allowance, for example, the existing studies suggest that cash support for childcare at home generates positive effect such as facilitating the development of children, alleviating the parents' burden of childcare expense, ensuring that parents have options for childcare, and improving the fertility rate, but it also has a negative effect in terms of ensuring women's rights to labor (Hae-Mi Yu et.al, 2011). Therefore, it is important to review both positive and negative aspects of paying cash allowance before adopting the policy.

Korea's low birth rate is at a globally unprecedented level, which is threatening the sustainability of our society. What are the reasons behind the total fertility rate of 0.7 which indicates population extinction crisis? There could be many different reasons for this, but the fundamental reason for the current low birth rate issue is the 'gender inequality in housework' that is prevalent among all generations. The foremost important task for Korea to resolve the low birth rate issue is to address the gap in housework and care between men and women (Hyun-Ah Lee, 2022). The dailiness and universality of housework and care apply to all human beings without exception. The 'dailiness of housework' indicating that the housework is conducted repeatedly every day and the 'universality of care' indicating that we are cared for by someone and care for someone during our life apply equally the same to both men and women. We can ensure the sustainability of our daily life and future generations, when both men and women share the dailiness of housework and universality of care and take the shared responsibility for housework and care.