

Parenthood and gender gap in leisure: a cross-national time use comparison

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Introduction

Research on gender inequality has amply assessed the paid work, house work and childcare gaps existing among men and women in current families. Cross-national studies have shown how institutional contexts interfere on family organizations and explain differences on time constraints. Yet, research on gender inequality in the use of time for leisure activities has been less prevalent, and the search for cross-national differences on gendered leisure patterns has almost been omitted. Through a Fixed-effect regression analysis, this study aims to broad the knowledge about gender inequalities among mothers and fathers with under-aged children by analysing differences in leisure time patterns on: 1) the total amount of time mothers and fathers dedicated to leisure; 2) the quality of this leisure time understood as: a) no-contaminated/no-fragmented time and b) social and active leisure instead of passive leisure; and 3) “with whom” this leisure time is enjoyed distinguishing between: a) alone; b) with couple; c) with children; d) in family.

Leisure time is conceived as an opportunity to relax and cope with work related stress, an occasion to enrich individual social capital (Mattingle and Bianchi, 2003), and a chance for personal growth (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000). In addition, quality leisure is related to physical and mental health (Brown and Brown 2001). To spend leisure time with other family members is at the same time claimed to be a sign of good marital quality (Glorieux et al. 2011), children’s human capital development (Gracia, 2014; Craig and Mullan, 2012) and family cohesion (Agate, J., Zabriskie R., Taylor S., Poff R., 2009). For all these reasons, to better understand in which institutional and cultural context women and men from different family organizations can obtain the best of their leisure time, and under which socio-demographic conditions couple distribute it in a more egalitarian way, is an approach to assess gender equality which cannot be belittle.

We pose three main hypotheses on the gender differences in leisure time among parents: First, we expect a lower amount of time dedicated to leisure for mothers than for fathers. Secondly, we expect the amount of leisure enjoyed by mothers to be more contaminated by other activities such as childcare than the leisure time enjoyed by fathers. Thirdly, we expect mothers to prioritise activities shared with their children and families, renouncing to leisure time alone, more than fathers do. The main contribution of our study is that we analyse gender differences in European countries adopting a couple perspective. This means that we take into account the potential relationship between leisure patterns and i) family arrangement (dual earners, male or female breadwinners) and ii) educational assortative mating of the couples. We also consider the role of gender culture and institutions at the country level.

Data and methods

The study is based on the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS) for four countries (Finland, Spain, France, Netherlands and UK). The Multinational Time Use Study is a harmonized database of a collection of national time-use surveys which contains identical set of activities and socio-demographic variables allowing for cross-national comparison studies. The original data were based on large nationally representative samples collected from 1960s to 2010s. The database currently contains more than 50 surveys from over 20 countries all worldwide.

The countries selected offer complete socio-demographic information of diarist as well as some additional characteristics of the household and its members. This allows the identification of co-residing families with under aged children. Each diarist report detail information on main and secondary activities for a 24 hours period, which gives the information on simultaneous activities. The diarist also recorded information about “with whom” the activity took place. For the countries studied we are able to analyse simultaneously the time use of both partners and address gender differences within the couple.

Variable and indicators

We measure total time in minutes dedicated to leisure by joining the time dedicated to different leisure activities on a 24 hours day (see table one for activities detail). To account for the quality aspect of leisure we assess for two different dimensions of this. Firstly, we

divided the main leisure activities into three categories (Social activities/Active leisure/Sedentary leisure) with the aim to expose its intrinsic nature (see table 1). Secondly, we include a measure of contamination and fragmentation by accounting how much leisure time is interspersed with other secondary activities such as child or house care. To determine “with whom” the activity took place a four category variable *Shared with* has been created differentiating between *alone/with spouse/with children/in family*.

Table 1. Main leisure activities divided into three sub-categories

Main activity		
Social activities	Active leisure (selection)	Sedentary Leisure
1.Voluntary, civic and organizational	1.Educational training	1.Relax, thing, do nothing
2.Worship and religion	2.Read to, talk to children	2.Read
3.General out-of-home	3.General sports	3.Listen music
4.Attend sporting events	4.Walking	4.Listen radio
5.Cinema, theatre, opera, concerts	5.Cycling	5.Watch tv, video
6.Other public events	6.Out-side recreation	6.Computer games
7.Restaurant, café, bar	7.Gardening	7.Surf internet
8.Party, social events, gambling	8.walk dogs	
9.Receive or visit friends	9.In house-games	
10.Conversation (person, phone)	10.Art or music	

Source: MTUS main activities recorded in IPUMS, 2019

Our three main dependent variables (leisure quantity, leisure quality, shared leisure) are analysed taking into account family arrangements (male breadwinner and dual earners), couple socio-economic status and nationality. We also control for week/weekend day, month of diary, number of children in household, aged of the youngest children and other adults presents in household. Finally, the institutional context is introduced by comparing countries that represent different gender cultures and different levels of diffusion of the dual-earner dual-career family model (Crompton 1999, Gornick and Meyers 2003).

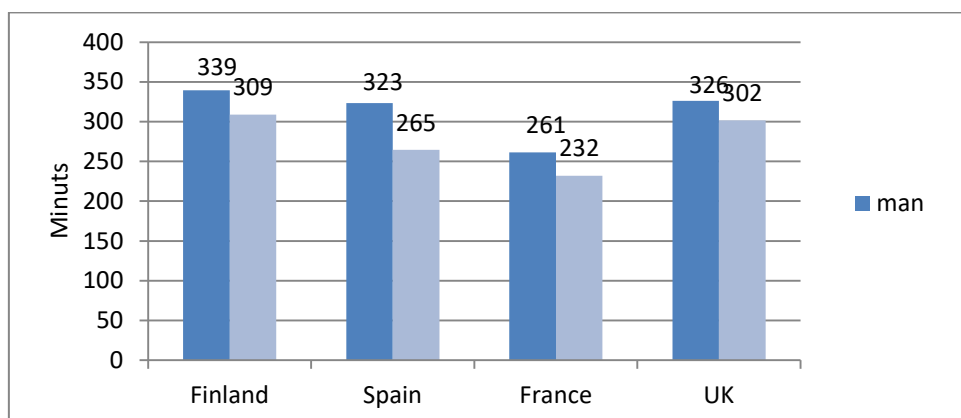
Techniques of analysis

In order to analyse the effects of couples’ characteristics in gender leisure inequality while accounting for country level differences, this article uses a set of fixed effect regression analysis. The fixed effects approach has been accepted as a good alternative to conventional multilevel methods in country-comparative analysis for a small number of countries. This method avoids the omitted variable bias concern through controlling for country level heterogeneity, and allows cross-level interactions while controlling for ‘random noise’ related to the country level (Möhring, K., 2012).

Preliminary results

For the whole group of countries the mean leisure time for man is 312 minutes per day and 277 minutes for women, which represents a 35 minutes gap between fathers and mothers with under-aged children. However, the total amount of time mothers and fathers dedicated to leisure, and the existent gender gap, varies upon countries (see Figure 1). Leisure time distribution among the three studied categories (social, active and sedentary) also presents some differences between men and women on the time dedicate to social and sedentary activities.

Figure 1. Total leisure time in minutes for parents with under-aged children by gender and country



Source: own creation using data from MTUS in Ipums, 2019

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