When She Works: Structural Transformation, Time Allocation, and the Domestic Division of Labour in Married Couples in India

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Abstract

Women's time use and labour allocation remain central to understanding gender inequality in economies undergoing structural transformation. In India, despite rising education levels and shifts in sectoral employment, female labour force participation (FLFP) remains persistently low, and women's domestic labour burdens remain disproportionately high. National time-use data reveal that increases in women's human capital and employment do not translate into reduced domestic responsibilities, highlighting the need to understand how economic opportunities reshape (or fail to reshape) intra-household time allocation.

This paper examines how women's employment status influences the domestic division of labour among married couples in Tamil Nadu, focusing on dual-earner (DE) and single-earner (SE) households. Using detailed household-level time-use and perception data, the analysis integrates domestic labour, women's employment, and gender ideology into a unified framework, an area where existing literature remains fragmented. Results show that DE couples exhibit more equitable time allocation than SE couples; however, tasks socially coded as 'feminine' remain largely assigned to wives. A Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition indicates that only about 12% of the SE–DE gap in domestic labour is explained by observable characteristics (education, income, demographics), suggesting that employment itself acts as a behavioural lever rather than a compositional effect. A bivariate probit model incorporating gender-ideology measures demonstrates that employed and educated wives reduce adherence to traditional norms. At the same time, husbands' egalitarian attitudes do not translate into meaningful increases in participation. The findings highlight a critical implication for structural transformation: female employment, more than shifts in stated gender norms, drives reallocation of time within households. Overemphasising gender norms without addressing constraints to women's economic participation risks limiting progress in gender equality research and policy in developing contexts.

Keywords: structural transformation, time use, domestic labour, gender inequality, labour markets, household behaviour, India.

JEL codes: J01, J15, J16, J21, J22

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Introduction

Women's participation in the global workforce has expanded, yet they continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, a 'double burden' that often constrains career advancement and economic autonomy (Acker, 1990; Connolly & Gregory, 2008). In India, this tension is especially pronounced: female labour force participation remains far below that of men, and national evidence reveals a persistent paradox, even educated and employed women continue to perform substantial household production (Sridharan, 2021). What sustains this enduring gender gap in domestic labour? Traditional economic explanations, such as Becker's specialisation hypothesis, argue that households allocate domestic tasks to the lower-earning partner to maximise efficiency (Becker, 1981). However, this framework falls short. A growing body of research shows that differences in education, employment, or earning potential cannot fully explain why women continue to bear a larger domestic load (Sofer & Thibout, 2019). Sociological perspectives offer a compelling alternative. The 'doing gender' hypothesis proposes that domestic labour persists not because of economic optimisation, but because household tasks are embedded in gender performance itself, helping explain why even higher-earning women in countries like the United States and France maintain substantial domestic workloads (Bittman *et al.,* 2003).

Evolving family structures and gender roles

Literature highlights a shift in family structures that profoundly affects household dynamics. The rise of 'dual-earner' families, introduced by Rapoport and Rapoport (1969), represents a model where both partners juggle careers and family responsibilities. This structure contrasts sharply with the traditional 'male breadwinner' model, long studied for its unequal division of labour (Luke *et al.,* 2014). While dual-earner couples are often assumed to embrace fairness in sharing paid and unpaid labour (Coltrane, 2000), social and cultural norms still play a significant role in defining gender roles within these families. As egalitarian values grow, men in such households are increasingly seen participating in domestic tasks. However, the extent of women's involvement varies. Some studies show that women in dual-earner families bear heavier burdens in both paid and domestic work, while others suggest a reduced engagement in traditional tasks like caregiving and housework (Ross *et al.,* 1983; Thornton, 1989). More recent research links women's increased contribution to household income with a more equitable division of domestic chores (Greenstein, 2000).

While Western studies suggest that women's employment has led to more equal domestic arrangements, the same cannot be said for the Indian context. If financial resources alone determined bargaining power, women in dual-earner couples would seemingly have the upper hand. Yet, the evolution of Indian women's work, both inside and outside the home, requires deeper exploration. Historically, even in joint-family settings, women exercised influence over certain family decisions, such as those regarding children's futures or land sales (Das, 1976). However, this influence was often exerted privately and limited to specific issues. With rising economic status and the shift towards nuclear families, women's decision-making roles expanded (Ramu, 1988). This shift from joint to nuclear family structures often moved decision-making power from the eldest male to the earning male, simplifying domestic

negotiations for women. This idea, known as the 'bargaining model,' posits that women's economic contributions increase their negotiating power within the household (Agarwal, 1997; Blood & Wolfe, 1960). However, feminist economists have criticised this model, arguing that women's income-earning potential does not always translate into greater household bargaining power. For example, studies by Rani & Khandelwal (1992) and Kabeer (1997) show that economic independence alone does not guarantee equality in decision-making. In India, adherence to 'gender norms' or 'gender ideology' continues to strongly influence household labour divisions (Rout *et al.,* 1999).

Rodman (1967) noted that in a modified Indian society[i], while women in dual-earner families may have gained more bargaining power, this has not translated into gender-neutral divisions of domestic work. Gender ideology, particularly 'gender display theory' (Goffman, 1976), offers a lens to understand men's behaviour in this context. Although research on gender display theory has been largely Western, it has proven relevant primarily to men in low-income settings (Sullivan, 2011). Yet, growing evidence suggests a departure from traditional gender displays among modern men (Kan, 2008; Schneider, 2011). Men today are increasingly adopting egalitarian norms, taking on more domestic responsibilities than previous generations. This shift challenges the Pareto-efficiency concept in resource allocation within households, particularly in relation to 'collective models' (Chiappori, 1988). The rejection of the specialisation hypothesis has prompted economists to incorporate gender ideology and social norms into their models, enhancing the neo-classical efficiency paradigm (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000).

Marriage, women's work and gender ideology

The findings discussed hold important implications for similar research in non-Western societies, such as India. Building on existing literature, this paper uses income-earning potential as a proxy for assessing domestic equality between women and men. It hypothesises that adherence to traditional 'gender ideology', or gender display, may be stronger in traditional single-earner couples, leading to lower bargaining power for women. Conversely, dual-earner couples are assumed to be less constrained by gender ideology, resulting in a more equitable division of domestic labour. This paper aims to explore the impact of gender ideology, beyond economic factors, on the domestic division of labour, specifically comparing labour division between husbands and wives in single-earner and dual-earner households, using married dyadic data from Tamil Nadu, India.

While recent studies have examined the gender gap in paid and unpaid work in India (Thakur & Marchang, 2022; Sahu, 2024), most focus on anomalies in measuring women's time use or demographic factors driving the gap. Few, however, investigate inequality stemming from income-earning potential in married couples. Moreover, though many cite gender norms as key determinants of domestic behaviour, they often fail to integrate gender ideology into economic models of household labour. This paper moves beyond merely documenting the gender gap in domestic labour by leveraging a novel primary dataset that combines socio-economic variables with time-use data and perception metrics on domestic labour and gender norms. I use a multi-faceted approach to addressing gaps in the literature by: a) Examining whether income-earning potential promotes a more equal division of labour; b) Providing empirical estimates of

inequality in household tasks between husbands and wives, controlling for socio-economic factors; c) Identifying how much of this inequality is explained and unexplained by socio-economic variables; and d) Assessing the role of gender ideology in shaping the division of domestic labour.

The analysis compares single-earner and dual-earner couples through econometric methods that control for demographic characteristics, education, earnings, and other socio-economic variables. This approach minimises structural differences between the two groups. The results show that dual-earner couples share domestic tasks more equally than their single-earner counterparts. The study further investigates gender ideology's influence on domestic labour division among single-earner couples using Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition. Under the assumption that dual-earner couples are less influenced by gender ideology, the unexplained portion of the inequality in chore-sharing between single and dual-earner couples serves as an indicator of gender ideology's impact. The decomposition reveals that only 12% of the difference in domestic labour sharing between these two groups is attributable to socio-economic factors, suggesting that much of the remaining gap is shaped by gender norms and social ideologies.

To further evaluate the role of gender ideology, a bivariate probit model is employed to analyse the likelihood of men and women adhering to gender norms[ii] and engaging in traditionally female-oriented domestic tasks. This analysis uncovers a significant divergence between gender perceptions and actual behaviour, especially among men. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how economic factors intersect with cultural norms to shape the gendered division of labour in Indian households, particularly within different earning structures.

Data and methodology

This paper uses data[iii] that was conducted at two levels, household and individual, between December 2022 and April 2023. The household survey inquired about demographic composition and other socioeconomic characteristics. The individual survey identified married, unmarried, and other household members. Individual surveys were conducted with women and men to gather information on age, marital status, educational attainment, workforce participation, income, and other factors. This survey was conducted in high, middle, and low-income areas of Tamil Nadu. This study focuses on Tamil Nadu, a southern Indian state known for its above-average Human Development Index (HDI) and rising per capita income, yet facing significant human development challenges. Despite progress in literacy, urbanisation, and living standards, issues such as limited access to opportunities for women and ethnic minorities persist (Vijayabaskar *et al.,* 2004). Female-headed households in Tamil Nadu experience higher poverty rates, and violence against women is on the rise (Human Development Report, 2017). Although women's labour force participation has increased, there is limited research on their domestic well-being, prompting further investigation. Households were selected from the Tamil Nadu Household Panel Survey (TNHPS)[iv] house listing database based on socioeconomic stratification (Ananth Pur *et al.,* 2022). The sample included households from two rural villages, one peri-urban town, and three urban blocks in Chennai and Thiruvarur[v], representing Tamil Nadu's wealthiest and poorest districts. Within the 301

households surveyed, this paper used selected data of married male-female dyads (N = 482) for the study. Due to the absence of a spouse during data collection, some households had unmatched dyads, which were excluded from the analysis. As a result, this study covers 241 dyads and a total of 482 respondents.

Around 90 questions were asked regarding the demographic and socio-economic conditions of the household. Specifically, a 24-hour time diary was used to collect data on the time spent on various activities, including paid work, domestic tasks, caregiving, travel, leisure, and socialising[vi]. Sub-activities within each main activity were also recorded. This paper primarily uses information on unpaid work, both domestic and caregiving, along with paid work, for contextual reasons. Within domestic work, sub-activities such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and textile maintenance, shopping, and home repairs were included. Within caregiving work, activities such as childcare, care for dependent adults, and care for nondependent adults were recorded. The different activities coded under childcare are feeding, helping with homework, picking up and dropping off at school/college, playing and so on.

To explore adherence to gender ideology, this study collected data on perceptions related to life, family, and work from both husbands and wives. In alignment with the paper's objectives, a 4-point Likert scale question was employed to assess gender perception, specifically the statement: 'Men and women need to share domestic work equally.' Respondents had the option to select from 'strongly agree,' 'agree,' 'disagree,' or 'strongly disagree.' While many studies examining the gender gap in domestic labour typically measure adherence to gender equality through behavioural differences in work-sharing between partners, this paper contributes to the literature by incorporating perceptions of gender roles to provide a deeper understanding of gendered behaviour.

Characteristics of the sample

I define 'earners' as individuals who participate in the labour market and contribute income to their household. Couples with a single income earner are referred to as 'single-earner' or SE couples, while those with two income earners are termed 'dual-earner' or DE couples. Although the sample is broadly categorised into single and dual earner couples, single-earner couples can be further classified into male-led (M-SE) and female-led single-earner couples (F-SE). However, the sample for female-led single-earner couples is relatively small, comprising only 15 couples. Additionally, the sample includes elderly couples who do not earn income through work but receive passive income from sources such as retirement funds, old-age pensions, and remittances. These couples are categorised as 'non-earners' or NE couples (31 couples). Table 1 presents the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the dyads, whereas Table 2 presents the same for the couples (individuals).

The primary comparison is between dual-earner (DE) and single-earner (SE) couples. Economic differences are also noted within SE couples, distinguishing between male-led and female-led SE couples. DE couples are slightly more prevalent in rural and low-income areas, typically living in nuclear families. In the sample, DE couples predominantly belong to Schedule Caste (SC) and Other Backward Caste (OBC) communities and form the youngest cohort, with an average age in the mid-thirties. Within the DE category, there is a slightly higher proportion of wives who are illiterate, but there is also a notable presence of wives with

some schooling or higher education. Many working wives in DE couples are engaged in casual labour; however salaried work is a close second. Interestingly, DE couples also have a slightly higher number of wives in salaried jobs compared to husbands. The log income is comparable between husbands and wives in DE couples.

Table 1 Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Dyads

	Dual-earner couple	Single earner couple		Non-earner couple
		Male-led	Female-led	
Rural	0.55	0.66	0.27	0.58
	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.50)
Urban	0.45	0.34	0.73	0.42
	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.50)
High-income district	0.45	0.34	0.73	0.42
	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.50)
Low-income district	0.55	0.66	0.27	0.58
	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.50)
Nuclear family	0.82	0.56	1	0.55
	(0.39)	(0.50)	-	(0.51)
Joint family	0.18	0.44	0	0.45
	(0.39)	(0.50)	-	(0.51)
Domestic help	0.16	0.1	0.13	0.26
	(0.37)	(0.30)	(0.35)	(0.45)
Child status	0.76	0.84	1	0.68
	(0.43)	(0.37)	-	(0.48)
SC	0.4	0.35	0.67	0.52
	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.51)
ST	0.01	0.01	0	0
	(0.11)	(0.10)	-	-
OBC	0.51	0.62	0.27	0.42
	(0.50)	(0.49)	(0.46)	(0.50)
GEN	0.08	0.02	0.07	0.06
	(0.27)	(0.14)	(0.26)	(0.25)
N	87	108	15	31

Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey (2022-23)
mean coefficients, SD in parentheses
Note: All the variables are dummies with a value of 0 or 1

Analysis of SE couples by gender shows that male-led SE couples live in rural and low-income areas and have the highest number of couples with children. In these couples, husbands typically have higher educational attainment than wives and are primarily involved in self-employment. Conversely, female-led SE couples tend to reside in urban and high-income areas. All these couples live in nuclear families, and both partners have the same level of educational attainment; however, only the wife participates in the workforce. Wives in this category are almost equally divided between casual and salaried work and have the highest income across all categories. SE couples are relatively young in the sample, with ages ranging from late thirties to late forties. This analysis highlights the stark differences in the socio-economic

characteristics of the DE and the SE samples. The next analysis is undertaken to understand the differences in the sharing of household labour between the couples.

Table 2 Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Husbands and Wives

	Dual-earner		Single earner couple				Non-earner	
			Male-led		Female-led			
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Age	39.64	35.63	46.31	41.33	42.4	38	74.16	67
	(11.38)	(10.46)	(13.92)	(13.74)	(13.46)	(12.55)	(7.81)	(10.55)
Illiterate	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.06	0	0	0	0.26
	(0.11)	(0.21)	(0.14)	(0.23)	-	-	-	(0.45)
Some schooling	0.52	0.54	0.69	0.66	0.73	0.73	0.48	0.26
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.46)	(0.48)	(0.46)	(0.46)	(0.51)	(0.45)
Higher education	0.25	0.26	0.19	0.15	0.13	0.13	0.16	0.16
	(0.44)	(0.44)	(0.39)	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.37)	(0.37)
Work participation	1	1	1	0.03	0.87	1	0	0
	0.00	0.00	-	(0.17)	(0.35)	-	-	-
Casual labour	0.39	0.46	0.24	0	0	0.47	0	0
	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.43)	-	-	(0.52)	-	-
Self employed	0.23	0.15	0.52	0	0	0.13	0	0
	(0.42)	(0.36)	(0.50)	-	-	(0.35)	-	-
Salaried	0.38	0.39	0.24	0	0	0.4	0	0
	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.43)	-	-	(0.51)	-	-
Log annual income	11.46	11.13	11.5	.	.	11.61	10.05	9.39
	(0.93)	(1.21)	(0.82)			(0.59)	(1.24)	-
N	87	87	108	108	15	15	31	31

Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey (2022-23)
mean coefficients, SD in parentheses
Note: All the variables are dummies with a value of 0 or 1, except for Age and Log annual income which are continuous

Equality in sharing unpaid tasks in couples

Now, I move on to analyse the distribution of domestic work between couples across different categories. Instead of using broad activities such as domestic and care work, I include sub-activities such as meal preparation or cooking; cleaning (including washing dishes, sweeping, and mopping); laundry; textile and footwear maintenance; grocery shopping for the household; and domestic repairs and maintenance. Other miscellaneous domestic activities, such as gardening and accounting, were not widely undertaken by the sample and are therefore omitted. Care work is further divided into care for children or young adults and care for other dependent adults. As seen in Cudeville et al. (2020), to understand the extent of equality or inequality in these tasks across couples, an 'equality' measure is estimated for each of the listed activities. However, unlike in Cudeville et al. (2020), the sharing of domestic tasks was not determined based on the partner's response regarding equal involvement but was instead based on the time reported by the partners for each task. The 'equality' variable is estimated by calculating the difference between the time spent by each partner on each task and the share of each partner in the overall couple's allocation of time to that particular task. This estimate of equality is more reliable than information on equal sharing collected based on partner perceptions, which could be heavily biased, as it is derived from time-use data.

Seven equality variables were created to represent the seven tasks: cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, repairs, childcare, and adult care. These variables take values from 0 or 1, where 0 represents that there was no sharing of tasks and 1 represents the sharing of tasks. The couple-wise means of equality is given in Table 3. All the analyses henceforth, will only be undertaken between SE and DE couple, non-earner elderly couples are left out in this analysis.

Table 3 Equality in sharing tasks

	Dual earner		Single earner					
	DE (1)		Male-led SE (2a)		Female-led SE (2b)		ALL SE (2)	
Tasks	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Equality in cooking	0.25	0.19	0.00	0.00	0.65	0.18	0.08	0.22
Equality in cleaning	0.20	0.25	0.03	0.17	0.13	0.35	0.04	0.20
Equality in shopping	0.41	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.63	0.12	0.08	0.21
Equality in laundry	0.18	0.14	0.01	0.10	0.21	0.19	0.03	0.13
Equality in repairs	0.61	0.30	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.20	0.04	0.13
Equality in childcare	0.44	0.26	0.04	0.19	0.65	0.35	0.11	0.29
Equality in adult care	0.02	0.15	0.02	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.13
Paid domestic help	0.16	0.36	0.10	0.30	0.13	0.35	0.11	0.30
Time disparity	1.45	1.33	3.39	1.3	1.86	1.4	3.2	2.18
N (Couples)	87		108		15		123	

Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; SD is standard deviation Note: Equality vars are dummies; Time disparity is an index

As seen in Table 3, the equality in sharing tasks is compared between dual-earner (DE) and single-earner (SE) couples. Within SE couples, estimates are provided separately for male-led (2a) and female-led (2b) SE couples. Compared to SE couples, more DE couples (1), have equality in task sharing. However, tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry show less equal sharing compared to grocery shopping, home repairs, and childcare. These latter activities also have higher male participation in domestic work among DE couples. In contrast, the presence of equality in sharing is very low in SE couples (2), thus exhibiting high inequality in almost all tasks, though childcare remains the task with the least inequality (0.11). The category of SE couples consists of two distinct sub-categories with different equality measures across tasks. In column 2b, female-led SE couples show more equality in traditionally female-centric domestic tasks, such as cooking and also have the highest equality in childcare between husbands and wives. This is starkly different from male-led SE couples (2a), where equal sharing of tasks is almost non-existent across all activities. However, even in this category, childcare continues to have relatively higher sharing than other tasks.

However, the difference in task division between dual-earner (DE) and single-earner (SE) couples only indicates the extent of sharing, not the degree of specialisation in each task. For example, while DE couples and female-led SE couples show higher equality in sharing, the non-working husband in female-led SE couples tends to have a higher share of the workload compared to the working wife. To better understand the direction of work sharing, an additional measure was created. This measure counts the number of tasks each spouse performs more of and calculates the difference between the two. This index provides the degree of imbalance in the division of tasks between the couple. Unlike Cudeville et al. (2020), who estimated the extent of inequality between homosexual and heterosexual couples based on partners' perceptions of their spouses' participation, this approach uses actual time estimates. This

method offers a clearer picture of labour division within couples. The 'disparity index' in task distribution ranges from 0 to 6, corresponding to the seven tasks mentioned earlier. A higher score signifies a greater difference in the number of tasks that are specialised within the couple. For analysis purposes, values 6 were combined with 5 due to the small sample size of couples with such a high disparity. This estimate further reinforces the notion that male-led SE couples have the highest disparity in time allocation. Out of the seven tasks, female homemakers in these couples spend more time on approximately 3.39 tasks than their husbands. In contrast, DE couples show less disparity, with working wives spending more time on an average of 1.45 tasks than their husbands, as seen in Table 4. Interestingly, female-led SE couples exhibit low disparity in labour allocation, where non-working husbands spend more time on an average of 1.86 tasks than their working wives.

The descriptive analysis highlights the fact that the DE and SE couples have divergent division of tasks, and vary from each other in terms of demographic and socio-economic differences. The next section will further analyse the differences between the two couples using econometric analysis.

Modelling of labour division between DE and SE couples

The first analysis is undertaken on both types of couples to understand the disparity in the division of tasks between the husband and the wife. Using the seven equality measures denoting the seven domestic and care tasks, probit estimations are run for the sample first, with a 'DE' dummy. In the second level, probit estimations are run separately for the DE and SE couples, and the 'female-led SE' dummy is introduced to study the isolated effects. All the variables given in Tables 1 and 2 are used as controls. The Average Marginal Effects (AMEs), which give the impact of a change in an explanatory variable on the predicted probabilities of all covariates, are presented in the paper.

Table 4 demonstrates the marginal effects for all covariates for the seven categories of equality of tasks between husbands and wives. A DE (dual earner) dummy is included. The probability of sharing tasks is positive and significant across all tasks, except for adult care, indicating that dual-earner couples are more likely to share tasks equally. Specifically, non-female-centric tasks, such as repairs and shopping, are more equally shared among DE couples compared to traditionally female-centric tasks like cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Notably, the equal sharing of childcare, traditionally viewed as a female-centric task, is also significantly positive for DE couples. Additionally, other controls reveal that couples in rural areas tend to have lower equality in task sharing, particularly in cooking, laundry, shopping, and cleaning. Overall, geographical location had a partial impact only on certain tasks, not all. For marginalised caste groups, a positive and significant effect on equality is observed in cleaning-related tasks alone. Couples in nuclear families exhibit more equal sharing in cooking, shopping, repairs, and childcare. Regarding economic controls, employment in casual labour is associated with lower sharing of tasks like cleaning, repairs, childcare, and cooking. Similarly, involvement in self-employment and salaried work is associated with negative equality in childcare. Conversely, an increase in income is associated with significant positive effects on the equality of sharing all tasks, except adult care.

Table 4 Marginal effects of covariates for all couples

Variables	cooking	cleaning	shopping	laundry	repairs	childcare	adult care
Dual earner couple	0.234***	0.073**	0.451***	0.066**	0.432***	0.395***	0.006
	(0.044)	(0.032)	(0.027)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.036)	(0.02)
Rural	-0.122***	-0.041*	-0.165***	-0.078***	-0.027	-0.08*	0.007
	(0.039)	(0.024)	(0.037)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.041)	(0.018)
Marginalised caste	0.053	0.085***	0.042	-0.089**	-0.018	0.106**	-0.016
	(0.045)	(0.03)	(0.041)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.046)	(0.022)
Nuclear family	0.17***	0.043	0.123***	0.019	0.084**	0.228***	0.016
	(0.047)	(0.032)	(0.043)	(0.031)	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.02)
Parent	0.197***	-0.087***	0.227***	0.013	0.074*	0.092*	-0.005
	(0.05)	(0.026)	(0.045)	(0.032)	(0.039)	(0.05)	(0.019)
Higher ed	-0.038	-0.12**	-0.026	-0.001	-0.059	0.013	0.036
	(0.059)	(0.056)	(0.052)	(0.039)	(0.048)	(0.058)	(0.024)
Casual labour	-0.16*	-0.147*	-0.076	-0.043	-0.128*	0 (0.085)	-0.028
	(0.087)	(0.083)	(0.077)	(0.062)	(0.069)		(0.042)
Self employed	-0.197**	-0.124	-0.118	-0.108	-0.169***	0.031	-0.037
	(0.085)	(0.084)	(0.073)	(0.063)	(0.064)	(0.08)	(0.04)
Salaried work	-0.094	-0.165*	-0.09	-0.081	-0.203***	0.088	-0.059
	(0.094)	(0.09)	(0.081)	(0.067)	(0.077)	(0.089)	(0.048)
Paid domestic help	-0.168**	0.075*	-0.058	-0.089*	-0.063	-0.053	
	(0.067)	(0.046)	(0.059)	(0.046)	(0.052)	(0.064)	
Log income	0.016***	0.014*	0.01*	0.008*	0.016***	-0.004	0.004
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.003)

*Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1; mean coefficients; SD in parentheses*

Note: The dependent variables are dummies reflecting equality of sharing the said tasks (0 or 1). All the independent and control variables are dummies, except for log income

While the probit analysis confirms the first hypothesis that DE couples have a more equitable division of labour across all tasks, the SE couples need more in-depth analysis. A similar probit estimation could be conducted for the sub-sample of SE couples to examine task-wise equality differences between male-led and female-led SE couples. However, the small sample size of the female-led SE cohort (15 couples) limits the feasibility of such an analysis compared to the male-led SE cohort (108 couples). To study the differential effects, we focus on the 'disparity index,' which measures the overall difference in tasks led by either the husband or the wife. Given that the index is a continuous variable, ordered probit estimations are performed in three stages: first, for all couples with a male-led SE dummy; second, for only the SE sub-sample with a female-led SE dummy; and third, for the DE sub-sample. As outlined previously, the equality measure is restricted to the extent of task sharing, making the 'disparity index' a more suitable metric. Table 4 shows the probit estimation of the disparity index for all couples, with 'Male-led SE' as a dummy. This analysis confirms the hypothesis that task disparity is higher for male-led SE couples and lower for female-led SE couples, with both estimates being significant. Despite the SE status of these households, the index shows divergent results, likely due to the gender of the single earner. Regarding the control variables, rural areas continue to exhibit higher disparity in task sharing. Notably, in nuclear families, in which many SE couples reside, task disparity decreases. Across all samples, being a parent is associated with higher

task disparity, even though husbands' participation in childcare activities is higher across sub-samples. As expected, couples who engage paid domestic help have lower task disparity, a finding significant for all couples and DE couples. Surprisingly, economic variables such as education, employment, and income do not have any significant effects.

The probit estimations reveal a significant association between economic status, measured primarily through the income-earning potential of partners, and the division of domestic labour within households. The study's sample includes couples from various age groups, with younger couples more likely to be in double-earner (DE) and female-led single-earner (SE) arrangements, while middle-aged couples are predominantly in male-led SE arrangements. The findings align with the initial hypothesis that the equality in sharing household chores varies between DE and SE couples, with a notable disparity in time spent on tasks being greater among SE couples. In households where both partners are employed and contributing to the income, there is an increase in equality across all tasks, particularly in traditionally male-centric tasks. The findings also show that the division of tasks is more unequal for couples in rural areas compared to urban areas. Interestingly, the results suggest a potential shift from the well-documented 'gender effect' to an 'economic dominance effect.' This shift indicates that the spouse with greater monetary influence, regardless of gender, tends to participate less in domestic labour. However, it is important to note that this finding is an outlier within the SE sample and may not be conclusive due to the small sample size.

Table 5 Ordered probit estimation of disparity index

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	All	SE	DE
Male-led SE	1.349***		
	(0.14)		
Female-led SE		-1.008***	
		(0.22)	
Rural	.395***	.577***	0.237
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.17)
Nuclear family	-0.195	-.281*	-0.081
	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.22)
Parent	.914***	.89***	.897***
	(0.15)	(0.24)	(0.19)
Casual labour	-0.008	-0.024	0.267
	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.26)
Self-employment	-0.215	-0.102	-0.084
	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.25)
Salaried	-0.159	0.04	
	(0.22)	(0.29)	
Higher education	-0.128	-0.132	-0.138
	(0.21)	(0.27)	(0.33)
Paid domestic help	-.414**	-0.37	-.443**
	(0.16)	(0.24)	(0.22)
Obs (couples)	210	123	87
Pseudo R2	0.157	0.097	0.064

*Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1; Robust standard errors are in parentheses*

Note: The dependent variable is the disparity index which is an ordered variable (0 to 5), all the independent and controls variables are dummies

The unequal division of tasks observed in DE and male-led SE couples leads to the next phase of the analysis. This phase aims to understand the 'disparity gap' between these two types of couples and determine the extent to which this gap can be explained by known factors.

Gap in task disparity between couples

In this paper, I first established the existing disparity in task allocation between dual-earner (DE) and single-earner (SE) couples. Treating DE and SE couples as distinct populations, the paper estimates the average disparity between them. It then shifts focus to understanding the underlying reasons for this disparity. This analysis lends itself to a decomposition method akin to the Blinder (1973) and Oaxaca (1973) frameworks, known as the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition. This approach breaks down the difference in mean disparity indices between the two groups into two main components: disparities in average observable characteristics across groups, and disparities in how these characteristics influence outcomes, as indicated by regression coefficients.

As per the first component, the disparity index is assumed to be associated with the observable characteristics (X) and unobservable characteristics (χ). β is the intercept. For the decomposition of the difference in group means to be valid and for the influence of unobservable factors (χ) to be eliminated, it is assumed that within each group, the unobservable factors are independent of the observable characteristics.

$$\text{Disparity}_i^{SE} = X_i\beta^{SE} + \chi_i^{SE} \qquad (1)$$

$$\text{Disparity}_i^{DE} = X_i\beta^{DE} + \chi_i^{DE} \qquad (2)$$

The equation estimates the differences in the mean task disparity between single-earner (SE) and dual-earner (DE) couples.

$$\text{Disparity}_i^{\text{SE}} - \text{Disparity}_i^{\text{DE}} = (\widetilde{X}^{\text{SE}} - \widetilde{X}^{\text{DE}})\hat{\beta}^{\text{DE}} + \widetilde{X}^{\text{SE}}(\hat{\beta}^{\text{SE}} - \hat{\beta}^{\text{DE}}) \qquad (3)$$

The first part of the equation illustrates the task disparity that would occur if SE couples' task allocation resembled that of DE couples. The second part represents the task disparity SE couples would exhibit if they followed DE couples' task allocation pattern. According to literature cited elsewhere and the findings from the data, an assumption is made that DE couples, due to their younger age, equivalent educational attainment, and income earnings, may exhibit less influence from gender ideology compared to traditional SE couples. This assumption underpins the choice of using the DE couples' task disparity as a counterfactual. The decomposition presented in Table 6 is structured around this counterfactual scenario.

Table 6 Decomposition of the difference in disparity between SE and BE couples – Blinder- Oaxaca

Variables	Differential	Decomposition	
Group 1; SE_PREDICTION	3.389***		
	(0.097)		
Group 2; DE_PREDICTION	1.448***		
	(0.104)		
difference		1.941***	
		(0.142)	
explained		0.234	12%
		(0.148)	
unexplained		1.706***	88%
Demographic and socio-economic variables as controls			
Obs (Couples)	195	195	

*Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.; standard errors are in parentheses*

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition results presented in Table 5 highlight a significant disparity in domestic labour between single-earner (SE) and dual-earner (DE) couples. It shows that the difference or gap in this disparity is substantial. Interestingly, only 12% of this difference can be explained by observable variables within the sample, such as demographic and socio-economic factors that vary between the two groups. The remaining 88% of the disparity differences remain unexplained.

These unexplained differences in domestic labour sharing between SE and DE couples are likely influenced by variables not included in the model, such as the differences in the work undertaken by couples, flexibility, benefits, employer policy and so on. Another set of unobserved factors can also be attributed to the role of norms, which has not been accounted for in the model. It is plausible that attitudes towards gender roles differ markedly between SE and DE couples, contributing significantly to the disparities observed. To explore this hypothesis, I now focus on the gender perception data collected from these couples. This data is useful to shed light on the nuanced aspects of the unexplained differences in disparity, offering insights into the underlying reasons behind the disparities in domestic labour between SE and DE couples.

Modelling gender ideology

To evaluate couples' attitudes toward sharing domestic work, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, 'Men and women need to share domestic work equally,' on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree.' This variable serves as a proxy for adherence to gender ideology: individuals who agree that domestic work should be shared equally are considered to have low adherence to traditional gender ideology, while those who disagree have high adherence. The responses were then converted into dummy variables to reflect adherence to gender ideology in the context of domestic work sharing.

Table 7 presents the differences in adherence to gender ideology among the three types of couples using a sample t-test. Husbands in female-led single-earner (SE) couples showed the highest adherence to gender ideology, indicating disagreement with equal sharing of domestic work (0.6). Interestingly, as shown in Table 3, these couples exhibited the least task-sharing

inequality, with husbands spending more time on domestic tasks than wives. Conversely, husbands in dual-earner (DE) couples reported the lowest adherence to gender ideology (0.23). Among wives, those in male-led SE couples predominantly adhered to gender ideology, whereas wives in DE and female-led SE couples generally did not. Significant gender differences in adherence to ideology were observed only among DE and female-led SE couples. While these data show some gender differences, we ought to probe further to unpack the relationship between adherence to gender ideology and the actual division of labour.

Table 7 Adherence to gender ideology – t-test

	Husband N	Wife N	Mean adherence Husband	Mean adherence Wife	Diff	St Err
DE	87	87	0.23	0.069	0.161***	0.053
Male-led SE	108	108	0.445	0.361	0.084	0.067
Female-led SE	15	15	0.6	0	0.6***	0.131

*Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

A bivariate probit is used to examine the relationship between husbands' adherence to gender ideologies and their actual involvement in tasks traditionally considered 'feminine' or female-centric. Previous econometric analysis indicated that tasks like cooking, doing the dishes, cleaning the house, and laundry/textile management predominantly involve wives in the sample. Consequently, this bivariate model explores how men's views on gender equality correlate with their participation in these female-centric chores. Utilising two binary variables, gender ideology and participation, I employ two binary probit models with distinct dependent variables. These models are analysed simultaneously, allowing for the estimation of the correlation between their error terms (Jones, 2007). The p-value in the bivariate probit analysis assesses the correlation between couples after accounting for all observable characteristics. In Table 8, I present the marginal effects of the bivariate probit.

Table 8 Marginal effects of bivariate probit estimations of husbands' adherence to gender ideology and their involvement in female-centric tasks

Variables	AME
Rural	0.009 (0.011)
18-25 age group	0.006 (0.014)
26-45 age group	-0.005 (0.015)
Some schooling	0.03** (0.014)
Higher education	-0.029 (0.019)
Q1 income	-0.03* (0.017)
Q4 income	-0.004 (0.016)
Parent	0.009 (0.013)
DE couple	-0.073*** (0.026)
Male-led SE couple	-0.063** (0.026)
Wife's time in paid work	0.0008* (0)

*Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1; Robust standard errors are in parentheses*

Note: All the control variables are dummies, except for 'wife's time in paid work' which is a continuous variable (minutes)

Geography did not significantly impact the division of labour, with men in rural areas showing insignificant probabilities. However, men cohabiting with their parents were more likely to adhere to traditional gender ideologies and less likely to participate in female-centric tasks, both significant findings. Husbands aged 18-25 were more likely to reject gender norms and significantly more involved in female housework. This trend also appeared in the 26-45 age group, although their involvement in female housework was not significant.
Contrary to expectations, husbands with higher education did not show significant results for holding more egalitarian ideologies. Similarly, increased income was not significantly associated with adherence to gender norms. The analysis of family type variables revealed intriguing results: fathers were more likely to follow traditional gender ideologies and less likely to contribute to female-oriented housework. Previous analyses indicated that fathers' contribution to childcare was significant. Previous analysis showed that there was a significant difference in labour division between DE and SE couples, only partially explained by existing factors. The bivariate probit shows that husbands in DE couples were less likely to follow gender norms in labour division, but also less likely to contribute to female-oriented housework, despite holding more egalitarian views. This aligns with Table 3, which showed DE couples are more likely to share non-feminine tasks like shopping and household repairs.
While childcare was traditionally seen as a mother-oriented task, emerging literature and the findings from this paper confirm that younger, more norm-defying men are more active fathers than older men. The model introduced two new variables to assess the impact of wives' labour market participation and time spent in employment. Increased labour market participation by wives correlated with husbands' greater adherence to gender norms. However, as wives' employment time increased, husbands' adherence to gender norms decreased, and their participation in female housework increased, with both results being significant.

A similar bivariate probit model is applied to wives to understand the differences between their perceptions and behaviours. However, the variables in this model are adjusted to account for the distinct correlations observed between husbands and wives. Unlike the model for husbands, which focuses solely on traditionally female-oriented tasks, this model includes all domestic tasks, reflecting the significant involvement of women in a broader range of household activities. The results from Table 9 show that the marginal effects of wives being in the younger age group of 18-25 are associated with a 27.7% decrease in the probability of adhering to gender ideology and being involved in domestic work. The education effects are also significant, with wives with some schooling having a decreasing probability of adhering to gender ideology as well as doing domestic work. As education increases, we see this effect becoming stronger for wives. For wives in DE couples, the marginal effect is negative and significant, with a 21.9% decrease in the probability of both outcomes. Overall, education, being in salaried work, earning high incomes and being in a DE couple significantly decrease the likelihood of wives adhering to traditional gender roles and also being involved in domestic work. I find a similar case for women who were the sole earners in households who have the highest probability of not following gender norms as well as reduced domestic burdens; however, this sample is sparse. Other factors such as rural residence, living in a multi-

generational household, having children, husband's work and receiving domestic help do not significantly affect adherence to gender ideology and involvement in domestic work for wives.

Table 9 Marginal effects of bivariate probit estimations of wives' adherence to gender ideology and their involvement in domestic work

Variables	AME
Rural	0.061 (0.049)
Mother or father-in-law present	-0.032 (0.053)
18-25 age group	-0.277*** (0.083)
26-45 age group	-0.223*** (0.078)
Some schooling	-0.137*** (0.048)
Higher education	-0.344*** (0.094)
In salaried work	-1.048*** (0.146)
Q1 income	0.036 (0.098)
Q4 income	-1.08*** (0.141)
Parent	0.013 (0.063)
DE couple	-0.219*** (0.061)
Female-led SE couple	-1.171*** (0.151)
Husband's LFP	0.041 (0.08)

*Source: Author's calculations from the Primary Survey; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1; Robust standard errors are in parentheses. All the control variables are dummies.*

The findings for wives in dual-earner (DE) couples further support the initial hypothesis that women in such arrangements are less likely to adhere to gender norms. Additionally, these women had a higher probability of spending fewer hours on domestic work. This model accounts for the use of paid domestic help by couples. Despite the lower likelihood of husbands in DE couples performing traditionally female-oriented housework, their increased involvement in other tasks such as shopping, household repairs and management, childcare and so on likely reduced the domestic workload for their wives.

Discussion

One of the critical issues of gender inequality in the 21st century is the persistently low female participation in the labour market, particularly in countries like India, where women's participation has historically lagged across all states. This disparity deepens gender inequalities, leaving women at a disadvantage in a capitalist economy and reducing their autonomy compared to men due to the financial benefits of paid employment. Moreover, within families, women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic labour.

This analysis contributes to understanding these emerging trends by demonstrating that the division of labour varies significantly across socio-economic categories. Notably, dual-earner couples exhibit greater equality in task-sharing than single-earner couples; however, tasks traditionally viewed as 'female-centric', such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, remain unequally distributed. In contrast, tasks like grocery shopping and home repairs are shared more equitably. Importantly, women in dual-earner households enjoy relatively better conditions than those in single-male-earner families, where equitable task-sharing is nearly

absent. This observation suggests that larger surveys may underrepresent dual-earner couples, potentially obscuring these disparities. The findings also reveal a small yet significant group of couples where women are the primary breadwinners. In these cases, the domestic burden on women decreases as their husbands take on more homemaking roles, including traditionally 'feminine' tasks. This phenomenon, documented by Kapadia (2009) in Chennai[vii], indicates the emergence of 'female breadwinners' in India's metropolitan areas, highlighting an area ripe for future research to assess whether complete role reversal, rather than equal sharing of paid and domestic work, could lead to more equitable outcomes for women.

Additionally, this paper explores 'gender ideology,' often seen as the elusive 'black box' in economic discourse. Limited survey data on domestic labour and perceptions have isolated these elements in existing literature. This study aims to integrate them into a cohesive framework. Using Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, the research finds that only 12% of the variance in labour division between single and dual-earner couples is explained by observable factors like demographics and socio-economic characteristics, with the remaining 88% attributed to gender ideology. While economic factors such as labour force participation correlate with greater equality, a lack of economic differentiation may shift adherence to social norms, particularly among men.

The analysis highlights a disconnect between men's perceptions of gender roles and their actual contributions to domestic labour, especially in dual-earner couples. Men display significant negative correlations between their perceptions and domestic participation, while such discrepancies are less pronounced among women, indicating that their engagement in domestic work may be influenced by factors beyond social ideology. Furthermore, an overemphasis on conforming to gender norms may not significantly advance the gender equality discourse, as observed practices often contradict expressed beliefs. This incongruence is especially relevant for men, who have historically been less engaged in domestic responsibilities. Promoting male egalitarianism risks resulting in superficial displays of gender equality without substantial changes in labour-sharing patterns.

A key contribution of this paper is highlighting the importance of economic factors, particularly female employment, in gradually shifting gendered behaviours among partners. Employed wives, regardless of their husbands' work status, exhibit higher equality in sharing domestic tasks, likely stemming from behavioural shifts rather than changes in gender perception. This reinforces the notion that female labour force participation not only enhances economic well-being but also has the potential to transform domestic dynamics over time.

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[i] Modified patriarchal society as specified by Rodman (1967).

[ii] The terms gender norms and gender ideology are used interchangeably.

[iii] The data for this paper come from household surveys conducted by the researcher in both rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu. The sample was drawn from the house-listing database of the ongoing Tamil Nadu Household Panel Survey (TNHPS). To ensure representativeness, socio-economic stratification based on income and social groups was applied. Data collection was carried out using Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI). The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of knowledgeable persons from villages during fieldwork.

[iv] The TNHPS is a state-level panel survey studying income and occupational shifts in the 38 districts in Tamil Nadu.

[v] I sampled two districts for this study: Chennai, with the highest household income of Rs. 3.14 lakhs in 2017-18, and Thiruvarur, with Rs. 71.5 thousand. According to the TNHPS, both districts have divergent socioeconomic patterns. Chennai is an urban metropolitan city, whereas Thiruvarur is predominantly rural, with less than 20% of the population living in cities. In Chennai, the most common type of work was private salaried employment, whereas in Thiruvarur, casual agricultural labour was more prevalent. Chennai had a 66 per cent Backward Class (BC) population, while Thiruvarur had a 50 per cent Scheduled Caste (SC) population.

[vi] I define activities based on the recommended activities in work and non-work categories in developing nations by Hirway (1999).

[vii] The slum sample studied in Kapadia (2009) was also a sample included in this study.