



Moroccan fathers' involvement in childcare: the case of dual-employed parents

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KEYWORDS

Household labour
-Task division - Fathers'
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ABSTRACT

In the past, fathers' lack of involvement in their children's life was practically unquestioned. However, with mothers' participation in the paid labour and the ensuing rise of the dual-earner family over the course of the last few decades, interest has moved to whether and how this change has affected parents' childcare responsibilities. In this article, we examine data from a sample of 30 dual-employed Moroccan couples with dependent school-aged children to investigate the degree of fathers' involvement in nine routine childcare-related activities. Findings of the study support previous research showing that while men have largely increased the time they spend with their children, their involvement remains mainly in educational and recreational activities.

Introduction

In Morocco, as in most other Arab countries, fathers have stereotypically been judged by their breadwinning role and have never been expected to devote time to caretaking and/ or nurturance. However, with the dual-earner phenomenon that is promptly replacing the traditional married couple of a breadwinner husband and a stay-at-home wife, women participate today in the outside paid labour and have joined men in social production. Still, they are usually found doing the vast majority of the family tasks.

Contrary to western countries where extensive research on fathers' involvement has been carried out, there is relatively little knowledge of what goes on inside Moroccan families, i.e. how childcare tasks are divided and/ or negotiated between dual-employed spouses. Therefore, the present article aims at enriching the empirical literature by focusing on describing who does what childcare-related task in a select group of 30 Moroccan dual-income married couples with dependent school-aged children.

Background

The recent transformations in the economy, the population growth and the narrowing of gender

differences in education have had large effects on the structure of the new family. Therefore, as Moroccan women started to move into the labour market from the 1960's onward, the stern dichotomy between the private sphere of the home and the public space of men started to be restructured (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006). The importance of the breadwinner role for men has declined. Today, many can no longer support their families on their sole income, and more women join the paid labour force. As a result, the assumption goes that men and women's practices and responsibilities are to be renegotiated and alternate arrangements are to be made.

Some recent western findings, for example, (eg. Parke, 1990) indicate that men are no longer less competent in childcare tasks and numerous studies have focused on 'equal caretakers', i.e. involved fathers who are physically and positively present on a regular basis for their children and who contribute to greater degrees in caring for them (Coltrane, 1996; Gerson, 2001). These fathers are increasingly aware of the importance of being involved in family relationships, especially in childcare and fathering and how rewarding this involvement can be.

Method

Childcare responsibility is analyzed in the present study as a set of specific routine tasks performed by the couple at home and outside the home. This instrument was administered to wives on who does what childcare task. In other words, the aim was to investigate the extent to which the task in question is performed by the husband, the wife, both or by someone else. This approach of collecting the information needed from only one respondent in the household has the advantage of being easily implemented and allows the researcher to avoid the trouble of determining whose reports are more truthful and exact if different answers are provided. The "who does what?" questionnaire was first developed by Cowan and Cowan (1979) in a longitudinal research on couple relationship at the University of California in Berkeley. The adapted version of the questionnaire used here investigates wives and/ or husbands' relative responsibility for nine routine childcare tasks selected on the basis of the age of the children which the researcher has set between 3 to 12. The tasks involve the most important activities associated with caring for little children; these are the following: helping children get ready in the morning, getting them ready for bed, playing with them, giving them a bath or a shower, making decisions about their upbringing, helping them with homework, taking the child to the doctor, caring for a sick child at home, getting up in the middle of the night to tend to the child and transporting them to and from school, activities, lessons and/ or friends' homes. For each childcare task, the wife had to indicate how she and her husband divided it. This was on a scale ranging from 1- Always me, through 3- Both together, to 4- Always my spouse, through 6- Is done by a third person until 7- Done by the child himself or herself.

There certainly exist different approaches to measuring childcare tasks such as the retrospective reports of time spent on the task, the experience sampling method or the time diary approach suggested by Lee and Waite (2005). Although these measurement methods sound to be more precise than traditional survey questions, they remain time consuming and more demanding for the participants who might be unwilling to collaborate. The researcher however maintains that since the tasks measured occur frequently, survey questions of proportional responsibility correspond more to the analysis. However, in spite of being a valuable tool that served in the collection of precious information about the couples and the way they divide domestic tasks, the use of questionnaires could not be used as the sole data source. In fact, when used alone, the method presents certain limitations. Since participants are asked to respond only to the options presented by the researcher, they are often unable to explain their choices, justify, elaborate and give details. As a result, studies are likely to

miss very important knowledge and interpretations remain deficient. Therefore, to enable participants to talk about their experiences, semi-structured interviewing techniques were further utilized in the study as a complementary method of gathering data. Though the questions in the questionnaire were close-ended requiring the respondent to choose from specific given alternatives, the researcher was always giving some room for elaboration.

Findings

In line with prior research which has long noted the inequity between spouses in household labour responsibility in general (Bianchi et al., 2000; Hochschild, 1989; Shelton & John, 1996), our findings also indicate that childcare is still mainly women's work. Despite some noticed contribution from husbands in terms of time spent with the children, mothers still bear the overall responsibility for the child-rearing tasks; and neither women nor men consider the possibility of a different arrangement. In fact, it is admitted that fathers today are making greater commitment and investment in caring for their children since they are becoming more and more sensitive to the importance of the effect an involved father may have on his children's social and emotional development. However, because women go through pregnancy over nine months before giving birth, we hypothesize that they become physically prepared for maternity and experience childcare as meaningful and pleasurable and thus shoulder most of the parenting responsibilities. Men, however, experience no emotional or physical experience before seeing their newborn. Furthermore, according to the sex role socialization theory, both men and women are attributed different social obligations and behaviors and are expected to conform to these. As a result, these expectations come to be judged as natural, fair and legitimate. In general, both men and women expect mothers to take the responsibility for childcare. Some fathers were found, nonetheless, to be more involved in certain selected parenting activities namely those involving play, leisure or education and may just perform other tasks in case of need (see appendices). In fact, fathers with a high level of education were found to contribute more to some routine childcare tasks. More specifically they were found to be far more likely to engage in play and other school-learning activities with their children and more involved in directing their upbringing and education than those with a lesser educational attainment. In addition, results showed that the more knowledgeable a father is about a specific field, the more likely he is to take responsibility for it. In the present study, a relationship was noticed for instance between some male participants' occupation and their involvement in their children's schooling. In other words, two male teachers from the sample were found to help their children with homework and lesson revision activities more than fathers having a different profession. No father, however, was found to be solely responsible for all the day-to-day childcare activities.

Competence or incompetence in performing a particular childcare related task was also found to be an issue for some fathers in the sample. The argument some fathers presented was that they are less competent than their wives in child-rearing. Others emphasized that fathers are not skilled in "mothering" activities, and defined "fathering" activities as those tasks men can generally be seen performing. Such tasks might include, among others, driving the kids to school and/or activities, helping with specific school-related tasks, taking sons to the barber's or to the public bath. Other chores were completely excluded from fathers' examples implying that these are the responsibility or the domain of the mother. What is more is that fathers in our sample perceive the fact of taking charge of some of the things related to their children as a kind of assistance to their wives and consider themselves as more helpful than other men they know.

Conclusion

All in all, fathers from different social and economic backgrounds fulfill their fathering roles differently. Some fathers are found to be engaged more than others. Some perceive child-rearing as a satisfying experience, others as a burden they usually try to escape. Nevertheless, although men have increased their time with their children, their involvement was found to be more in educational and recreational childcare activities than in managerial or direct physical caring tasks. Therefore, a household arrangement in which a woman comes home after work only to start a second shift with the children, while the husband takes time to restore his energy after his day at work further stresses the persisting gender inequity in today's society.

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Appendix 1: Parents Childcare Responsibilities

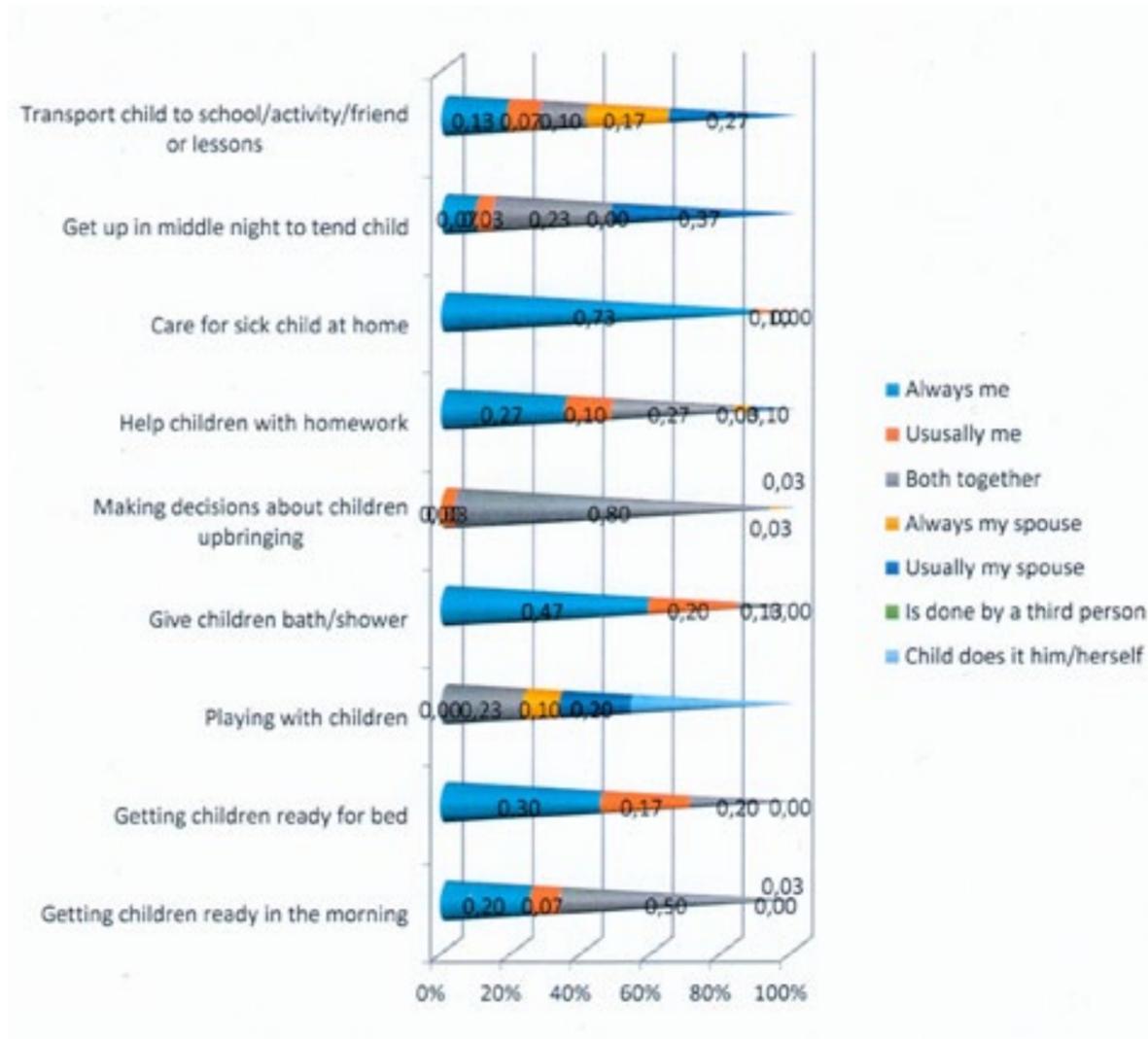
Who does the following tasks related to childcare?

Childcare Tasks	Always me	Usually me	Both together	Always my spouse	Usually my spouse	Is done by a third Person	Child does it himself or herself
Getting your children ready in the morning							
Getting your children ready for bed							
Playing with your children							
Giving your children a bath/ shower							
Making decisions about your children's upbringing							
Helping children with homework							
Caring for a sick child at home.							
Getting up in the middle of the night to tend to the child							
Transporting children to and from school, activities, friends' home or lessons.							

In your opinion, what influences the division of family tasks between you and your spouse?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. I appreciate your input!

Appendix 3: Reports of Childcare Tasks Division between Spouses



Appendix 4: Division of Childcare tasks between Spouses

Who does tasks related to childcare	n	Blank	Always me	%	Usually me	%	Both together	%	Always my spouse	%	Usually my spouse	%	It's done by a third person	%	Child does it him/herself	%	100%
Getting children ready in the morning	30	0	6	0,20	8	0,27	15	0,50	0	0,00	1	0,03	0	0	0	0	1
Getting children ready for bed	30	0	9	0,30	15	0,50	6	0,20	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0	0	0	1
Playing with children	30	0	0	0,00	0	0,00	7	0,23	3	0,10	6	0,20	0	0	14	0,47	1
Give children bath/shower	30	0	14	0,47	12	0,40	4	0,13	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0	0	0	1
Making decisions about children upbringing	30	0	0	0,00	4	0,13	24	0,80	1	0,03	1	0,03	0	0	0	0	1
Help children with homework	30	0	8	0,27	10	0,33	8	0,27	1	0,03	3	0,10	0	0	0	0	1
Care for sick child at home	30	0	22	0,73	8	0,27	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0	0	0	1
Get up in middle night to tend child	30	0	2	0,07	10	0,33	7	0,23	0	0,00	11	0,37	0	0	0	0	1
Transport child to school/activity/friend or lessons	30	0	4	0,13	10	0,33	3	0,10	5	0,17	8	0,27	0	0	0	0	1