

Chapter 15

Time Allocation and the Life Cycle of Women and Men in Poland

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ABSTRACT

The way people spend time determines the quality of their lives. Work takes a significant share of the time we have at our disposal. The allocation of time between paid and unpaid work depends on gender as well as age, and it influences women's and men's opportunities. This chapter analyses the allocation of women's and men's time between paid and unpaid work in the context of life-cycle. In the first part, economic theories concerning decision making processes about how to allocate time between market work and household are presented. The allocation of women's and men's time in distinguished age groups in Poland is analysed in the second part of the chapter. The analysis is based on time use data from research conducted by Central Statistical Office in years 2003-2004. The last part presents the logistic function that allows to determine estimated maxima of women's and men's activities both in paid and unpaid work. The analysis confirmed that time allocation depends both on gender and life-cycle.

INTRODUCTION¹

The way people spend time determines the quality of their lives. Work takes a significant share of time we have at our disposal and there are two different kinds of work. One that people perform in the labour market and receive remuneration for, and the other one they do at home caring for the members of their households or communities. This second kind of work is often called home duties or responsibilities, and although it is not remunerated, it is time consuming, as typical work we do in the market. The allocation of time between paid and unpaid work depends on gender, and it influences women's and men's opportunities.

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This chapter analyses the allocation of women's and men's time between paid and unpaid work in the context of life-cycle. In the first part, economic theories concerning decision making processes about how to allocate time between market work and household are presented. The allocation of women's and men's time in distinguished age groups in Poland is analysed in the second part of the article. The analysis is based on time use data from research conducted by Central Statistical Office in years 2003-2004. The data used in the chapter is the latest available set. The time-use surveys are conducted every 12 years, since the patterns of spending time evolve very slowly (it is usually a matter of several minutes). The last part presents the logistic function that allows to determine estimated maxima of women's and men's activities both in paid and unpaid work. The hypothesis tested in the article is that gender and age (life period) determine the allocation of time between paid and unpaid work. Women spend more time performing unpaid work, as well as total work (paid and unpaid combined), and this decreases their ability to make choices concerning both reproductive and productive realms of their lives.

BACKGROUND

In 1960s New Home Economics a new approach within neoclassical economics developed. Representatives of this approach tried to analyse the gender division of labour in the home. This division is largely explained by the comparative advantage model, which argues that marriage provides economic gains to both partners. Through marriage, men and women can specialize and exchange, leading to maximization of their total bundle of goods and services – those produced in the market as well as those produced at home (Becker, 1973). In this way the discussed approach offers the explanation why women specialize in home-based goods and services. Family members specialize in the paid labour or in domestic labour in accordance with their relative productivities in those sectors. In a household of identical individuals no more than one person will contribute time to both paid labour in the market and household work, the dual contributor being equally productive in the two sectors. To maximize household output those who are more productive than the dual contributor in the market sector will specialize there, while those who are more productive at home will become specialized domestic workers. Constant or increasing returns to scale in the production of household commodities raise the payoff to specialization and each member will specialize in one sector only. To identify who will specialize in the paid labour market, and hence who will be the altruistic head of the household, biological sex must be introduced. Women are defined as having a comparative advantage in household work because of their role in the reproductive process (Hewitson, 2003, p. 269). According to Gillian Hewitson (2003) in new home economics firstly, women's roles as the unpaid workers within the households are functions of their biology, and hence they become an aspect of their identity – they are biologically motivated to care about others. Secondly, unpaid labour is an activity that women undertake for their own self-interest, to enable the household to maximize the total output.

Initially, in neoclassical theory it was assumed that people at the productive age divide their time between work and leisure. Jacob Mincer (1962) in his article about married women in the labour market questions this assumption. He writes that such a simple dichotomy – work and leisure – is not true even in the case of men, but is particularly false in the case of women. The logical part of the so-called leisure time is unpaid work that women perform in households. Some activities defined by Gary Becker as leisure could be easily categorized as self-investment, or household production. Mincer adds that like educational activities, which are a very significant element of children's lives, work for the family is an

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