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Household management and the gendered division of unpaid work in dual-earner couples: Theoretical and methodological insights³

Abstract

This paper explores the theoretical and methodological foundations of household management in the context of unpaid work, focusing specifically on dual-earner couples. Unpaid work, including household chores, childcare, and eldercare, represents a critical yet often invisible component of both economic and social life. Despite its importance, the management and division of unpaid work have received limited scholarly attention, particularly in countries like Slovakia. This paper provides a review of key theoretical approaches and international empirical research, highlighting how gender roles and negotiation processes shape the distribution of unpaid labour. While the article does not analyse gender inequalities as its primary focus, it acknowledges the gendered nature of household management practices and their potential implications for work-life balance and well-being. The paper argues for the integration of management perspectives into unpaid work studies, emphasizing the need to understand households not only as sites of consumption but also as units of organization and coordination. Finally, it outlines directions for future research, calling for context-specific empirical studies to better capture the unique features of dual-earner households in Slovakia and similar socio-economic environments. The findings have implications for public policy, gender equality initiatives, and the well-being of individuals within dual-income families.

Keywords: dual-earner couples, gender roles, household management, unpaid work.

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³ This article was supported by the National Research Agency of Slovakia, project VEGA No. 1/0536/24 Slovak Household Management and Decision-Making about Unpaid Work in the Post-Covid Economy.

**Zarządzanie gospodarstwem domowym a zróżnicowany
ze względu na płeć podział nieodpłatnej pracy w związkach dwuzarabiających:
ujęcie teoretyczne i metodologiczne**

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje teoretyczne i metodologiczne podstawy zarządzania gospodarstwem domowym w kontekście pracy nieodpłatnej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem związków dwuzarabiających. Praca nieodpłatna, obejmująca obowiązki domowe, opiekę nad dziećmi oraz opiekę nad osobami starszymi, stanowi istotny, choć często niewidoczny element życia gospodarczego i społecznego. Pomimo jej znaczenia zarządzanie i podział pracy nieodpłatnej były dotychczas w ograniczonym stopniu przedmiotem badań naukowych, szczególnie w takich krajach jak Słowacja. Artykuł przedstawia przegląd kluczowych podejść teoretycznych oraz międzynarodowych badań empirycznych, podkreślając, w jaki sposób role płciowe i procesy negocjacyjne kształtują rozkład pracy nieodpłatnej. Choć analiza nierówności płci nie jest głównym celem artykułu, Autorzy uznają płciowy charakter praktyk zarządzania gospodarstwem domowym oraz ich potencjalny wpływ na równowagę między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym oraz dobrostan jednostki. W artykule argumentuje się na rzecz włączenia perspektyw zarządczych do badań nad pracą nieodpłatną, z naciskiem na potrzebę postrzegania gospodarstw domowych nie tylko jako miejsc konsumpcji, ale także jako jednostek organizacji i koordynacji. Na koniec przedstawiono kierunki przyszłych badań, wskazując na potrzebę kontekstowych badań empirycznych, które lepiej uchwycą specyfikę związków dwuzarabiających w warunkach słowackich i w podobnych środowiskach społeczno-ekonomicznych. Wnioski artykułu mają znaczenie dla polityki publicznej, inicjatyw na rzecz równości płci oraz dobrostanu osób żyjących w rodzinach o podwójnych dochodach.

Słowa kluczowe: pary z podwójnymi dochodami, role płciowe, zarządzanie gospodarstwem domowym, praca nieodpłatna.

JEL: D10, D13.

INTRODUCTION

Households play an irreplaceable societal role, receiving substantial academic attention from various perspectives aimed at understanding internal dynamics and external environmental interactions. However, given the private nature of households, it is often difficult for researchers to fully “penetrate” this sphere. Consequently, empirical insights into household behaviour – either of individuals or the household as a unit – are limited and therefore particularly valuable. This paper seeks to offer a less conventional, yet highly relevant and socially desirable, perspective on household functioning. While still relatively rare in Slovakia and many other European countries, this perspective applies theoretical concepts from management science to the household context.

The daily decisions and processes within households are unlikely to be entirely spontaneous or intuitive. In many cases, it can be assumed that household members rely on coordinated procedures closely aligned with the traditional functions of

management as known from business practice. The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding household management in the context of unpaid labour. It also presents methodological approaches and international experiences in household research, while suggesting how these may be adapted to the Slovak context. Our conceptual foundation is grounded in existing approaches to household management that seek to explain its mechanisms and provide pathways for empirical investigation. These approaches, when appropriately modified, offer numerous insights applicable to real-world research.

Although international studies provide valuable insights into household management and unpaid labour, the Slovak context remains relatively underexplored. Existing research shows that Slovak households demonstrate distinctive features, especially in the volume and gendered distribution of unpaid work. These features reveal both similarities and differences compared to households in other countries, which will be discussed in later sections of this article. Emphasizing these characteristics highlights the need to adapt international theoretical and methodological approaches to the Slovak environment, where systematic empirical research remains scarce. In line with the above, the aim of this article is to describe a theoretical framework of household management in the context of unpaid labour, specifically in the case of dual-earner couples, based on the analysis of theoretical foundations and research from various countries. Although our article is primarily theoretical, the methodological approach to processing this article is based on its theoretical focus and is adapted to the aim of describing a theoretical framework of household management in the context of unpaid labour. The article is based on a qualitative analysis of secondary scientific sources from various countries that reflect the management of everyday life in the household. The analysis of these sources allowed us to identify experiences with primary survey methodology, which may be beneficial in the next phase of research under the conditions of the Slovak Republic, as these findings are rare for Slovak households and socially desirable.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF HOME MANAGEMENT AND HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

Home management consists of a series of decisions that together form the overall process of utilizing family or household resources. In this context, family goals are of primary importance, as all managerial activities are directed toward their fulfilment, which in turn provides maximum satisfaction for the family. Home management is considered an essential component of family life, contributing to the health, well-being, and development of all its members (Varghese, 1985). Hill and McFarland (1971) define home management as the mental coordination of all individuals one must collaborate with, as well as the selection of goals one

aims to achieve. In addition to goal-setting, home management also involves managing financial resources. It is a joint effort by spouses or partners to handle their household economically and emotionally (Jain, 2019). In contrast, Medina (1991) presents a more traditional perspective, where the husband is viewed as the primary breadwinner, reflecting the family's social and economic status in society, while the wife assumes full responsibility for childcare and home management. Beyond motherhood, this domain encompasses home economics components including familial relationships, safety, child development, and resource allocation. The administrative dimension emphasizes planning, integration, and evaluation of household resources to optimize quality of life for all members (AwadAllah, 2019; Amin, Akhter, 2011).

Theoretical concepts of “household management” identify specific cognitive and organizational tasks facilitating family and household care, defined as the amount of time spent considering family and housework throughout the day (Ciciolla, Luthar, 2019). The concept may thus be viewed as a key responsibility, as decisions related to family and household matters are inherently tied to financial resources. When resources are scarce, household management becomes a burden. In contrast, when financial resources are sufficient, decision-making is significantly easier. Indeed, household income directly influences nearly all household-related activities (Yovcheva, 2012; Treas, Tai, 2012; Srinivasan, Athuru, 2005). Activities associated with household management include time allocated to meal planning and preparation, organizing daily routines, scheduling appointments for household members, managing services and repairs, and making financial decisions (Mederer, 1993; Winkler, Ireland, 2009). The distribution of these tasks is often influenced by gender, the employment status of spouses, the presence of children, or even the number of cars the family owns (Srinivasan, Athuru, 2005). Nosheen, Ali, and Ahmad (2011) argue that household management is predominantly associated with women, who assume this responsibility alongside motherhood.

Household management and unpaid labour demonstrate significant interdependence through the coordination of finite resources including human capital, financial assets, time allocation, and energy distribution for essential domestic task completion. Effective household management functions optimize task distribution, facilitate equitable responsibility allocation, and mitigate interpersonal conflict among household members. Technological advances and artificial intelligence integration present potential efficiency improvements through reduced temporal burdens and enhanced coordination mechanisms via digital applications and smart systems, thereby contributing to domestic harmony – an essential goal of household management. Theoretical approaches to household management in the context of unpaid labour offer valuable tools for empirical research, helping to enhance our understanding of current dynamics in this area, which is undoubtedly influenced by external societal trends.

The concepts of home management and household management are often used interchangeably; however, based on an analysis of the scholarly literature, we have identified several differences. Home management is perceived as a more complex concept, oriented toward family goals. We understand it as a part of household life, emphasizing health, well-being, and the development of family members. On the other hand, household management is more specific, focusing on concrete everyday tasks and their implementation. Home management often has an emotional dimension, as many publications mention the joint efforts of partners, while household management is characterized by pragmatism, with an emphasis on efficiency and time management.

UNPAID WORK IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Increased academic attention to unpaid work in economics and sociology began during the 1960s and 1970s (Swiebel, 1999). Unpaid work is one of the most important sources of comfort in individuals' everyday lives and constitutes a key component of the economy, contributing to overall societal well-being at the macroeconomic level (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016; Hirway, 2015). Miranda (2011) highlighted the significance of unpaid work in the context of well-being, asserting that it contributes substantially to both present and future well-being within households and communities. The paradox lies in the fact that while unpaid work promotes well-being, it can simultaneously hinder women's economic status, thus reducing their independence and life satisfaction. This is not due to unpaid work itself, but rather to its unequal distribution and mismanaged household organization (Bruyn-Hundt, 1996). Measuring unpaid domestic work is important mainly to inform policies that promote a fairer division of paid and unpaid work between women and men (Bednárík, 2024).

Despite the existence of many definitions in the literature, the core understanding of unpaid work – as deliberate, productive activity carried out within households, outside the official labour market, for which no financial compensation is received – remains largely intact (Považanová, 2016). According to Harvey and Taylor (2000), unpaid work encompasses the minimum amount of time required for the household operation and maintenance, including raw materials transformation into consumable goods and ensuring a healthy, clean living environment. It also includes cooking, gardening, shopping, managing social and personal relationships, and providing auxiliary services accessed through the public or private sectors. Products of unpaid labour may also benefit individuals outside the household, such as assisting an elderly relative with gardening (Picchio, 2003; Miranda, 2011). Antonopoulos (2008) argues that unpaid work lacks societal recognition, and that numerous factors – age, gender,

household composition, geographic location, social class, and the presence or absence of children – influence the division of time between paid and unpaid labour. Measuring its volume highlights inequalities in time distribution, specific responsibilities, economic resources, and social accountability, while underscoring its essential role as a dynamic component of the economic system (Picchio, 2003).

Households typically devote a comparable amount of time to unpaid work as to paid employment. Since the home represents a vital setting for daily life, research is increasingly focusing on household technologies, seen as tools capable of transforming lifestyles and improving quality of life (Aldrich, 2003; Lehdonvirta, Shi, Hertog, Nagase, Ohta, 2023). According to Hertog, Fukuda, Matsukura, Nagase, and Lehdonvirta (2023), unpaid tasks – particularly those related to domestic labour – are highly susceptible to automation. Smart home technologies can significantly reduce gender disparities in household responsibilities, decrease time on undesirable tasks, increase leisure time, and enhance personal autonomy in aging. These technologies must recognize household habits and preferences to maximize quality of life improvements. Simultaneously, privacy protection and misuse prevention are essential, which contradicts the above assumption (Friedewald, Da Costa, Punie, Alahuhta, Heinonen, 2005).

DUAL-INCOME COUPLES AND CONCEPTS INFLUENCING THEIR DECISION-MAKING

A couple consists of two individuals who are in a marriage, romantic, or sexual relationship, or are together for a specific purpose (Cambridge Dictionary, [http](http://)). Dual-income couples have begun to challenge traditional gender stereotypes, as women are increasingly the ones contributing to the family economy, while men contribute emotionally (Harrington, VanDeusen, Humberd, 2011; Howe, 2012). Rahman, Jan, Bibi, and Ahmad (2021) point out that marriages with two income earners are a source of mutual moral and emotional support for both partners. There are several typologies of couples that help to highlight the variability and understanding of differences within and between dual-income couples (Masterson, Hoobler, 2015). Raley, Mattingly, and Bianchi (2006) examined typologies based on the contributions of each member of the marriage to the overall family income. They identified couples in which the husband was the primary income provider, equal-income providers, and couples where women were the dominant earners. Through an alternative approach, researchers have identified three types of dual-income couples: the high-status couple, associated with high job prestige and the importance of work in their lives; the low-stress couple, marked by lower prestige and lower job overload; and the primary-secondary provider couple, characterized by a large disparity in the working hours of the spouses (Crouter, Manke, 1997).

Clarkberg and Moen (2001) did not focus on the prestige or status of couples, but instead examined each partner's working time. They categorized couples into nontraditional full-time, nontraditional long hours, dual-career full-time, dual-career long hours, and husband part-time. A different perspective is offered by Moe and Shandy (2010), who introduce the concept of "100-hour couple," where partners collectively work more than 100 hours per week as a household.

The first theoretical concept that deals with the division of unpaid domestic labour between men and women is the perspective of relative resources. This approach assumes that power relations influence unpaid work distribution, with household members' relative socio-economic resources creating negotiating power over time allocation to unpaid labour (McElory, Horney, 1981). The income level of individual household members directly influences responsibility allocation, with economically dependent women or those experiencing constrained employment access demonstrating diminished bargaining power and subsequently undertaking the majority of unpaid domestic labour (Raley, Bianchi, Wang, 2012; Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez, González-Flores, 2020). The author Schneider (2011) confirms theory that income functions as bargaining power-until spousal parity is reached. When women earns more than a men, thus violating the breadwinner norm, they paradoxically increase their share of unpaid work. Apart from this approach, power is also addressed by Sprey (1979) in the theory of conflicts, where he assumes that people in a marital union compete for power with each other. The theory of human capital takes into account access to time and its subsequent distribution by household members or the couple between the labour market and household work. In this case, the division of labour is the result of the couple's rationality, who seek to maximizes the welfare and utility of the household (Becker, 1993; Oinas, 2018). According to this approach, paid and unpaid work division reflects comparative advantages between men and women, determined by education and income levels. Higher comparative advantage correlates with reduced time spent on unpaid household work (Becker, 1993; Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez, González-Flores, 2020). Oinas (2018) asserts that studies examining income's impact on household labour division consistently demonstrate relatively equitable unpaid work distribution when spousal income disparities are minimal. However, Sevilla-Sanz, Gimenez-Nadal, and Fernández (2010) reject the comparative advantage and income hypotheses, instead supporting gender behaviour theory and masculinity/femininity influences.

From a gender perspective, paid work is considered masculine and more valuable, whereas unpaid domestic work is regarded as feminine and less valuable (Downing, Goldberg, 2010). Freudenthaler and Mikula (1998) argue that the unequal division of household labour stems from societal expectations defining gender-specific work roles. The presence of traditional roles leads women to

feel responsible for unpaid household labour, which increases their share of domestic duties regardless of their income level (Zimmerman, 1987). Due to social roles and gender stereotypes, women have adopted instrumental tasks such as cooking and laundry, quiet managerial tasks like household scheduling and time management, administrative duties such as planning, and significantly, they are assigned responsibility for mental labour (Moulton-Tetlock, Ahn, Haines, Mason, 2019; Hessing, 1994; Lee, 2005). Women who endorse traditional gender stereotypes do not perceive the unequal division of unpaid domestic work as a barrier or injustice; rather, from their perspective, they see themselves as primarily responsible for household and family work. It is generally observed that women's satisfaction also rises if their husbands perform more domestic work compared to other husbands in their social circle (Greenstein, 1996; Himsel, Goldberg, 2003).

Given that the aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding household management in the context of unpaid labour, in the introductory part we worked with secondary sources of scholarly literature. Primarily, we drew on books, publications, academic articles, research studies, and databases. The following section of this paper compares multiple studies addressing unpaid work management in dual-income households. To ensure diversity, several scientific studies from different parts of the world were selected for comparison. The focus will be on research methodologies, the implementation of surveys in real conditions, and the comparison of the results achieved. From the methods of scientific inquiry, we primarily employ comparison, analysis, and synthesis in the concluding part of the paper.

COMPARISON OF METHODOLOGIES FOR RESEARCHING THE MANAGEMENT OF UNPAID WORK IN HOUSEHOLDS

To understand the management of unpaid work in dual-earner households, we examined several empirical studies from different socio-cultural contexts. Studies were selected based on systematic search using terms “dual-earner couples” and “unpaid work,” with selection criteria including: 1) thematic relevance and direct alignment with the research focus, and 2) geographical diversification with emphasis on proportional representation of different national contexts. These studies differ in sampling methods, data collection techniques, and research objectives, but collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of domestic unpaid work. In this section, we introduce a comparative analytical framework along five key dimensions: 1) data collection method; 2) sample composition; 3) country and context; 4) main analytical focus; 5) notes on tools or limitations.

Table 1. Methodological Overview of Selected Studies

Study	Data Collection Method	Sample Composition	Country/ Context	Main Analytical Focus	Tools/ Limitations
Stevens, Kiger, Riley (2001)	Structured survey, separate questionnaires for each partner	156 dual-earner heterosexual couples	USA (Rocky Mountains)	Marital satisfaction, domestic chores division, gender ideology	Spanier's 7-item scale, strong emphasis on spousal satisfaction
Bartley, Blanton, Gilliard (2005)	Survey via workplace channels	233 participants from female-dominated workplaces	USA (Southern states)	Gender ideology, decision-making, equity perception	Multi-step distribution, Likert scales, potential selection bias
Alby, Fatigante, Zuccheromaglio (2014)	Focus group interviews, daily activity charts, video recordings	15 working mothers + 8 families	Italy (Rome)	Mental load, managerial responsibility, real-time behavior	Rich qualitative data; small, non-generalizable sample
Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez, González-Flores (2020)	Time-use diaries, secondary data	1,269 dual-earner households from larger sample	Spain	Time spent on childcare and housework vs. income levels	Eurostat activity codes, 24-hour time logs, OLS regressions
Craig, Churchill (2020)	Online survey	1,536 dual-earner couples with children	Australia	Pre/post-COVID changes in household labour and care roles	Longitudinal (retrospective) design, Likert items, pandemic context
Zaman, Shadid (2023)	Survey using Likert scale and Dual-Career Parenting Scale	50 couples employed in the formal economy	Pakistan (Islamabad, Rawalpindi)	Emotional strain, work-life balance, gender roles	Small sample, extensive psychometric tools (e.g. Cron Cronbach's alpha)

Source: own elaboration.

This structured comparison highlights several patterns:

1. Quantitative vs. qualitative designs. While most studies employed structured surveys that enabled broad generalizability and statistical analysis, Alby, Fatigante, and Zuccheromaglio (2014) introduced a qualitative dimension through in-depth interviews, activity charts, and video recordings. This approach allowed for deeper insight into intangible aspects such as emotional labour,

mental load, and tacit managerial responsibility often overlooked in standard surveys. Their study offers a fine-grained perspective on how women structure and manage domestic routines in real-time.

2. Focus on gender roles. All studies acknowledged gendered patterns in unpaid work and confirmed a disproportionate domestic burden on women. Theories of relative resources, gender ideology, and symbolic gender roles were consistently applied as interpretive frameworks. Several studies found that even when women earned more than their partners, they continued to perform the bulk of domestic work – reflecting the endurance of traditional gender expectations and compensatory behaviours.
3. Cultural and economics contexts. Studies spanned diverse geographical and cultural settings, allowing for a rich comparative understanding of unpaid work. For example, the Spanish study examined economic variables such as income and employment in relation to unpaid work, while the Pakistani study highlighted the burden of societal gender norms and their effects on emotional strain and time pressure. The Italian and American studies focused more heavily on family dynamics, religious beliefs, and role negotiation within households. These contextual differences reveal how unpaid work is shaped not only by income and employment but also by cultural expectations and institutional support structures.
4. Pre-pandemic vs. pandemic dynamics. Craig and Churchill's research (2020), conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided valuable insights into how crisis contexts alter domestic unpaid work patterns. Their findings revealed a temporary increase in men's caregiving involvement; however, this was accompanied by a simultaneous and greater increase in women's unpaid workload. The study illustrates the fragility of progress toward gender equality in household work under crisis conditions and the importance of structural supports for sustainable change.
5. Use of tools and scales. Most quantitative studies utilized validated instruments, such as Likert-type scales, time-use diaries, and equity perception tools, to measure attitudes, behaviours, and workloads. Zaman and Shadid (2023) also used the dual-career parenting scale to assess emotional strain in dual-earner couples. In contrast, qualitative research focused more on discursive strategies, narrative structures, and situational analysis. The variety of tools and indicators across studies demonstrates the multidimensional nature of unpaid work and suggests that mixed-method approaches may be particularly valuable in future research.

In summary, despite differing methodologies, all reviewed studies confirm persistent gender disparities in household labour. They collectively underline the need for further context-sensitive empirical inquiry – especially in under-researched regions such as Central and Eastern Europe.

COMPARISON OF RESULTS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF UNPAID WORK
IN DUAL-EARNER HOUSEHOLDS

In each of the studies reviewed, the authors paid particular attention to the time couples allocated to unpaid (domestic) labour. Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001) found that women spent approximately 15 hours per week on household tasks, while men spent only 6.8 hours per week. Bartley, Blanton, and Gilliard (2005) examined the division of domestic labour in more detail, distinguishing between low-control and high-control tasks. They found that wives spent more time performing low-control tasks, whereas men tended to handle those with higher control. Unlike the aforementioned authors, Alby et al. (2014) did not quantify the time spent on unpaid work. Instead, working mothers were characterized as family life managers, bearing the “mental load” of household responsibilities through efficiency planning, detail monitoring, routine management, and family decision-making organization. Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez, and González-Flores (2020) demonstrated that women’s domestic labour allocation diminishes until achieving income parity. Interestingly, when women’s earnings surpass their partners’, domestic labour increases, replicating patterns observed among lower-earning women. This model supports the claim that women may compensate for higher earnings by devoting more time to housework. Craig and Churchill (2020) tracked unpaid work changes during COVID-19, finding women spent 1.7 more daily hours than men on housework, household management, and childcare pre-pandemic, increasing to 2.3 hours during the pandemic. Zaman and Shadid (2023) confirmed this pattern, with women averaging 24.36 weekly hours on domestic tasks versus men’s 16.56 hours.

A distinct component of unpaid work is childcare. While Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001), as well as Bartley, Blanton, and Gilliard (2005), did not focus specifically on this type of labour, Alby et al. (2014) did. They found that mothers constantly monitored their children’s needs and, even when the father was actively involved, the mother remained responsible for envisioning, planning, and executing the activity. Altuzarra et al. (2020) examined the relationship between income and time devoted to childcare. They concluded that earnings did not significantly affect men’s and women’s time devoted to childcare. Before COVID-19 restrictions, the gender gap in active childcare was 54%. Craig and Churchill (2020) observed that this gap narrowed to 40% during the pandemic. Zaman and Shadid (2023) identified a strong link between work-family balance and financial strain.

Regarding partner satisfaction with the division of domestic labour, Stevens et al. (2001) found that women were less satisfied than men. Women’s satisfaction increased with the number of hours their partners spent on housework and was

positively associated with their gender ideology. Conversely, the more time women spent on domestic chores themselves, the less satisfied they were. Bartley et al. (2005) did not explore this particular aspect, but Alby et al. (2014) indirectly indicated dissatisfaction among women, describing the unequal burden as a source of fatigue. While Altuzarra et al. (2020) did not address this issue directly, Craig and Churchill (2020) explored subjective experiences of time allocation during the pandemic, finding that many mothers experienced reduced time constraints, enhancing perceptions of parental equity. However, one-third reported bearing disproportionate unpaid labour responsibilities. The perceived gender gap in fairness increased from 18% to 28%. Zaman and Shadid (2023) did not address partner satisfaction with the division of unpaid work.

From the perspective of gender ideology, Stevens et al. (2001) argued that gender ideology indirectly affects women's marital satisfaction through domestic work engagement. Women identifying with traditional gender ideologies perform more housework yet feel more satisfied with the labour division. Bartley et al. (2005) reached similar conclusions, stating that gender ideology has a direct impact on how labour is divided between men and women. Alby et al. (2014) consistently highlighted gender inequality in labour division, emphasizing how gender ideology shapes planning, organization, and task allocation in households. Altuzarra et al. (2020) also noted the influence of gender ideology in relation to income – based task division. Although Craig and Churchill (2020) did not directly study gender ideology, their findings relate to gender equality in households. They noted that fathers were forced to increase their caregiving time during the pandemic, but mothers' unpaid workload also increased – indicating mixed outcomes regarding gender equality. Zaman and Shadid (2023) confirmed that women bear the majority of household responsibilities due to harmful gender stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

Exploring unpaid work's multidimensional contexts provides valuable insights into household functioning. This paper examined theoretical aspects of unpaid work management in dual-earner households – a relatively unconventional perspective offering deeper understanding of household processes before and during unpaid work performance. Drawing on theoretical knowledge and existing studies enabled several key conclusions. From a theoretical perspective, unpaid work and household management constitute interconnected constructs, with management functioning as an inherent component of household operations, particularly concerning unpaid work coordination. Unpaid work performance necessitates deliberative choices regarding task allocation, scope, quality parameters, and beneficiary designation. These aspects represent only a selection

of the everyday “dilemmas” households must resolve in light of the many activities that comprise unpaid work. The identified aspects are influenced in real-life settings by factors such as household size, household income, the educational attainment of household members, and the time household members spend on paid work. Dual-earner households exemplify contexts where both partners participate in the labour market, creating complex constraints for unpaid labour organization. The findings we have reached indicate that the methodology for examining the chosen dimensions is not standardized, leaving ample room and potential for researchers or research teams focused on the management of unpaid labour. Most of the studies reviewed relied on questionnaires as their primary data collection method. This approach enables large sample sizes that facilitate generalization of findings, provided the questionnaire is well-structured and clearly understood by respondents to ensure valid responses. With appropriate structuring, this method can ensure a degree of comparability of information and data, allowing for partial comparison of results within a country as well as across countries. Such comparisons can be useful, for example, in explaining cultural differences and customs among households in different contexts. In Slovakia, the area of unpaid labour has already been partially explored, which creates a significant opportunity for continuing and deepening research to reflect current social and economic realities. The insights we gained through this study have confirmed the necessity of researching unpaid labour, as it remains an integral and inseparable part of household life. Its organization adapts to technological advancements and the evolving labour market, which increasingly includes remote work arrangements. Based on the review of available literature and the synthesis of findings from real-world studies across different contexts, our next ambition and challenge is to design and conduct a survey in Slovakia that focuses on selected aspects of unpaid labour management. Acknowledging the current state of knowledge, as well as the benefits and limitations of surveys and research in this area, has led us to the conclusion that focusing on specific types of households is beneficial. Such a targeted approach enhances the generalizability of conclusions within defined household types. However, given the vast and heterogeneous nature of household populations, full generation remains unfeasible due to their inherent diversity and complexity.

When examining the specifics of Slovak households in the area of unpaid work in comparison with the studied regions – the USA, Italy, Australia, and Pakistan – we observe several similarities as well as differences. In terms of the amount of time spent on unpaid work, women in Slovak households devote approximately 31 hours per week (Kika, Martinkovičová, 2015), while in Pakistan it is 24.34 hours per week (Zaman, Shadid, 2023), and in the USA it is about half as much as in Slovakia, according to Stevens et al. (2001). For men in Slovak households, it is approximately 17 hours per week (Kika, Martinkovičová, 2015), in Pakistan very

similarly 16.56 hours per week, and in the USA only 6.8 hours per week. On the basis of the selected studies, we can therefore claim that, at least among these three countries, the extent of unpaid work performed weekly is the highest in Slovakia. Australia, Italy, and all the other countries under review were characterized, from the perspective of gender ideology related to the division of unpaid work, by the persistence of stereotypes, and in all cases, women performed more of this type of work than men. The situation is no different in Slovakia, where many specific tasks are even categorized as “women’s” and “men’s” work (Kika, Martinkovičová, 2015). In Italian households, Alba et al. (2014) mentioned in many cases the presence of the mental load of women, described as managers of family life, routine organization, and decision-making. A similar feature can be observed in Slovakia, where decision-making is often delegated primarily to women. On the other hand, the authors emphasize that many of these arrangements also arise from mutual agreement among household members, aimed at maximizing utility (Kika, Kollár, 2020).

The theoretical concept of this article helped us to better understand and penetrate the essence of household management in the context of unpaid labour among dual-earner couples. At the same time, we identified methodological approaches for collecting primary data in this field from various countries, which is inspiring for the next phase of our research. The information obtained from Slovak households is essential not only for economic and political decision-making in family and social policy but can also provide valuable insights for private sector employers, who can gain a better understanding of the internal processes within households – an environment that is difficult to access and comprehend. Given the current lack of knowledge in this area, future research can provide information and facts that will serve as a useful complement to the existing secondary data from various publicly available sources.

The aim of this paper was to provide a theoretical framework for understanding household management in the context of unpaid labour. In line with the above, the aim of this article was to describe a theoretical framework of household management in the context of unpaid labour, specifically in the case of dual-earner couples, based on the analysis of theoretical foundations and research from various countries. The article offers important insights into the management and gendered organization of unpaid work within dual-earner couples, a topic with strong relevance for both social inequality research and economic development studies. While it does not aim to measure or explain gender inequalities directly, it acknowledges their presence as an important contextual factor shaping household dynamics. The findings suggest that understanding how unpaid work is managed can help promote more equitable sharing of responsibilities, improve work-life balance, and support the well-being of all household members. From a policy perspective, the article underscores the need for measures that encourage shared

caregiving, challenge traditional gender roles, and recognize the value of unpaid work. Finally, the paper calls for future empirical research in Central and Eastern Europe to generate context-specific evidence that can inform both scholarly debate and policy interventions. However, we aim to highlight questions for future research, particularly from theoretical and methodological perspectives in the Slovak context. What factors influence the redistribution of unpaid work in dual-income households in Slovakia? Which data collection methods are most optimal for examining the scope and structure of unpaid work in dual-income households in Slovakia? What challenges are associated with research focused on the scope and structure of unpaid work in dual-income households in Slovakia?

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