

Couples who share the housework are more likely to divorce, study finds

Divorce rates are far higher among “modern” couples who share the housework than in those where the woman does the lion’s share of the chores, a Norwegian study has found.



The report found the divorce rate among couples who shared housework equally was around 50 per cent higher than among those where the woman did most of the work. Photo: ALAMY

By Henry Samuel, Paris

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In what appears to be a slap in the face for gender equality, the report found the divorce rate among couples who shared housework equally was around 50 per cent higher than among those where the woman did most of the work.

“What we’ve seen is that sharing equal responsibility for work in the home doesn’t necessarily contribute to contentment,” said Thomas Hansen, co-author of the study entitled “Equality in the Home”.

The lack of correlation between equality at home and quality of life was surprising, the researcher said.

“One would think that break-ups would occur more often in families with less equality at home, but our statistics show the opposite,” he said.

The figures clearly show that “the more a man does in the home, the higher the divorce rate,” he went on.

The reasons, Mr Hansen said, lay only partially with the chores themselves.

“Maybe it’s sometimes seen as a good thing to have very clear roles with lots of clarity ... where one person is not stepping on the other’s toes,” he suggested.

“There could be less quarrels, since you can easily get into squabbles if both have the same roles and one has the feeling that the other is not pulling his or her own weight.”

But the deeper reasons for the higher divorce rate, he suggested, came from the values of “modern” couples rather than the chores they shared.

“Modern couples are just that, both in the way they divide up the chores and in their perception of marriage” as being less sacred, Mr Hansen said. “In these modern couples, women also have a high level of education and a well-paid job, which makes them less dependent on their spouse financially.

They can manage much easier if they divorce,” he said. Norway has a long tradition of gender equality and childrearing is shared equally between mothers and fathers in 70 per cent of cases.

But when it comes to housework, women in Norway still account for most of it in seven out of 10 couples. The study emphasised women who did most of the chores did so of their own volition and were found to be as “happy” those in “modern” couples.

Dr Frank Furedi, Sociology professor at the University of Canterbury, said the study made sense as chore sharing took place more among couples from middle class professional backgrounds, where divorce rates are known to be high.

“These people are extremely sensitive to making sure everything is formal, laid out and contractual. That does make for a fairly fraught relationship,” he told the Daily Telegraph.

“The more you organise your relationship, the more you work out diaries and schedules, the more it becomes a business relationship than an intimate, loving spontaneous one.

“That tends to encourage a conflict of interest rather than finding harmonious resolutions.” He said

while the survey applied to Norway, he was confident the results would be the same in the UK.

“In a good relationship people simply don’t know who does what and don’t particularly care. “Unless marriage is a relationship above anything else, then whenever there are tensions or contradictions things come to a head. You have less capacity to forgive and absorb the bad stuff.”

The survey appeared to contradict another recent one across seven countries including Britain that found that men who shouldered a bigger share of domestic responsibilities had a better sense of wellbeing and enjoyed a better work-life balance.

The researchers expected to find that where men shouldered more of the burden, women’s happiness levels were higher. In fact they found that it was the men who were happier while their wives and girlfriends appeared to be largely unmoved.

Those men who did more housework generally reported less work-life conflict and were scored slightly higher for wellbeing overall.

Experts suggested that, while this may be partly because they felt less guilty, the main reason could be that they had simply learnt the secret of a quiet life.

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