



The Effect of Husband's Participation in Housework on Fertility Intentions: A Gender Role Perspective

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Abstract

Background: This study aims to investigate how a husband's participation in housework impacts women's fertility intentions. While previous studies have explored individual determinants, the role of a husband's participation in housework remains under-examined in the context of Indonesia. **Objective:** The primary aim of this study is to empirically analyze the relationship between a husband's participation in housework and fertility intentions in Indonesia. **Method:** The study uses data from Susenas 2022 and applies ordinal logit analysis. The hypothesis is that a higher level of a husband's participation in housework positively correlates with greater fertility intentions among women. **Results:** The analysis reveals that women whose husbands participate in housework are more likely to have higher fertility intentions compared to those whose husbands do not participate. Other significant factors influencing fertility intentions include parity, education level, employment status, and geographic region. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that a husband's participation in housework is important because it influences women's fertility intentions in Indonesia. Promoting gender equality in domestic responsibilities may encourage higher fertility intentions. These findings are important for policymakers aiming to enhance gender equality and address fertility issues in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, fertility trends in Indonesia have continued to decline. According to the Population Census (SP) and the Long Form SP2020, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Indonesia decreased from 5.6 in 1971 to 2.18 in 2022. The current TFR, which is at the replacement level, is considered ideal for any country. However, mitigation and control measures are necessary to prevent

further declines in the TFR. The long-term effects of a TFR below the replacement level may lead to a decrease in population and challenges related to an aging population are similar to those experienced by developed countries. An aging population presents a new set of challenges, as nations with low fertility rates risk entering a low-fertility trap, which could have detrimental effects on the economy and employment.¹

Research on fertility has primarily focused on theories that explain the causes of low birth rates, often emphasizing economic motivations and the opportunity costs associated with having children. However, fertility theories suggest that in developed countries with very low fertility rates, this trend is influenced by the imbalance between gender equality in public and family spheres.² Very low birth rates are believed to result from high gender equality in the public sphere, combined with low gender equality in the family environment.^{2,3} Recent studies have indicated that the disparity in gender equality between public and family settings results in a negative relationship between egalitarianism and the intention to have children.⁴

Numerous studies indicate that the decision to have children is a mutual agreement between spouses, influenced by the decision of each individual.^{5,6} Fertility intentions are shaped by the behaviors of women and their partners, with gender equality playing a significant role in these behaviors.² While the increase in female participation in the labor market offers a partial explanation, differences in gender systems across countries—particularly regarding the rights and responsibilities assigned to men and women—are also crucial for understanding low birth rates.³

Literature on gender norms in Indonesia indicates that gender roles are derived from 'kodrat' and ideologies that position women as primarily responsible for family and child rearing. Indonesia is a country that adheres to social norms in which men are expected to be the breadwinners, while women are tasked with caregiving responsibilities.⁷⁻⁹ The traditional family model, where women are responsible for childcare, makes it difficult for women to balance work and parental responsibilities.¹⁰ When women take on dual roles, they become paid workers and continue to carry out most housework. Mandel et al. found in their research that wives who earn higher incomes still do not share domestic responsibilities equally with their husbands. These women remain primarily responsible for daily housework and do not use their higher income to redistribute household duties.¹¹

Gender inequality in housework persists in Indonesia, with women spending significantly more time on it than men.¹² Men tend to perform more 'masculine' housework, such as repairs and yard work, while women handle more 'feminine' tasks like cooking and cleaning. Research by Setyonaluri et al. on domestic tasks in Indonesia found that husbands' contributions to childcare and housework were still less significant than their wives.¹³

This background raises an important research question: Is there a relationship between husbands' participation in housework and fertility intentions in Indonesia? This study aims to empirically analyze gender equality theory by exploring whether husbands' participation in housework influences women's fertility intentions in Indonesia. It aims to contribute to the existing literature, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of gender equality on fertility intentions in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study utilizes cross-sectional data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) of March 2022. Gender equality within the family is assessed based on the husband's participation in housework, as outlined in the Susenas March 2022 questionnaire. The unit of analysis in this study includes women aged 15-49 who are married, living with their husbands, and not using contraception. This aligns with the sequences of reproductive behavior, where fertility intentions are indicated by specific behaviors, such as sexual intercourse, non-use of contraception, or the use of technologies that facilitate conception.

The dependent variable in this study is fertility intention, categorized into three levels: high intention (coded as 2) for those who desire to have a child/another child within less than 2 years, low intention (coded as 1) for those who wish to have a child/another child in 2 years or more, and no intention (coded as 0, the reference category) for those who do not want any more children. The main independent variable in this study is husbands' participation in housework. Additionally, several control variables are included, such as urban/rural classification, geographic region, parity, women's education, partner's education, women's employment status, and expenditure quintiles.

The analysis used in this study is ordinal logistic regression, as the dependent variable consists of more than two categories with a meaningful order. The general model for ordinal logistic regression is expressed as:

$$y^* = \log \frac{P(Y \leq k|X)}{P(Y > k|X)} = \text{logit } P(Y \leq k|X) = \alpha_k + \beta_1 x_1 + \dots + \beta_p x_p + \varepsilon$$

Where:

y^* ordinal response variable,

α intercept parameter,

β_p^K parameter vector,

x_p predictor variable vector,

ε error term, assumed to be normally distributed.

The ordinal logistic model assumes that the odds are proportional, which means the slopes (β) for independent variables are constant across all dependent variable categories, while only the intercepts (α) change. This arrangement contrasts with the multinomial logistic model, where both intercepts and slopes differ across categories.

For an independent variable X_1 with two categories (0 and 1), the model can be specified as:

$$\text{logit } P(Y \leq k | x_1 = 1) = \alpha_k + \beta_1$$

$$\text{logit } P(Y \leq k | x_1 = 0) = \alpha_k$$

The difference between the two logits:

$$\text{logit } P(Y \leq k | x_1 = 1) - \text{logit } P(Y \leq k | x_1 = 0) = \beta_1$$

Here, β_1 indicates the change in log odds for X_1 being in categories 1 or 2 (lower categories) versus category 3 (highest category) when $X_1 = 1$, compared to $X_1 = 0$.

In this study, the models for fertility intention are defined as follows:

Model 1:

$$\log \left[\frac{P(Y \leq k | X)}{1 - P(Y \leq k | X)} \right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{husband's participation} + \beta_2 \text{age} + \beta_3 \text{parity} + \beta_4 \text{urban} + \beta_5 \text{island} + \beta_6 \text{educf} + \beta_7 \text{educm} + \beta_8 \text{workf} + \beta_9 \text{workm} + \beta_{10} \text{quintile} + \varepsilon$$

RESULTS

Beginning with descriptive statistics, Table 1 presents the distribution of the data. According to Table 1, 44.31% of women aged 15–49 in Indonesia reported intending to have children in the future, while 55.69% expressed no intention of having children. Among the women who intended to have children, 26.78% desired to have children within less than two years (high intention). Regarding husbands' participation in housework, the data show that 35.41% of husbands participated in housework. Based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, women aged 15–49 typically have an average of two children (30.02%), live in rural areas (57.40%), and most reside on the island of Sumatra (28.46%). In terms of education, the majority of women have only completed elementary school or less (36.88%). Similarly, most husbands have an education level in elementary school or below. Regarding employment, over half of the women are employed, either in formal or informal jobs.

The percentage of women who intend to have children is higher when husbands participate in housework compared to when they do not (Table 2). Among husbands who help with housework, 29.5% report high fertility intentions, compared to 25.3% among those who do not. Fertility intention

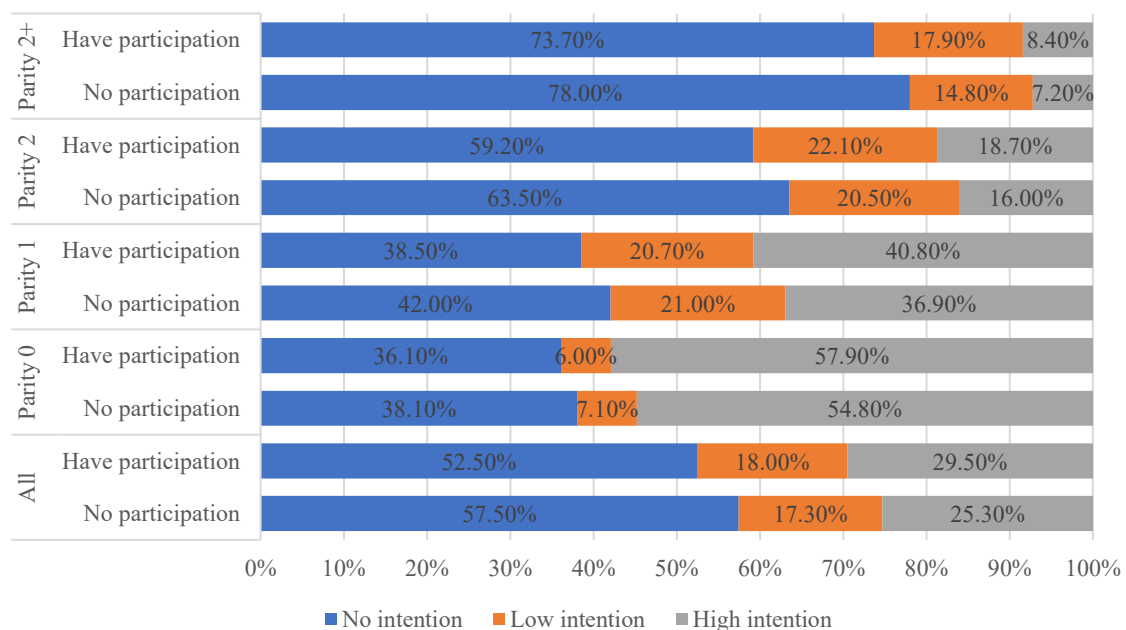
is also closely linked to parity. As shown in Table 2, the desire to have children decreases with higher parity. The percentage is highest among childless women, decreases slightly after having one child, and continues to decline for women with two children. This pattern underscores the connection between fertility intentions and parity. This finding aligns with the study by Bandehelahi *et al.*, which suggests that women often adjust their ideal family size after having their first child, leading to variations in the ideal number of children based on parity. Additionally, most research indicates that fertility intentions are shaped by parity-specific fertility control, which involves limiting childbearing after reaching a certain number of children.¹⁴

Table 1. Distribution of sample by characteristics

Variable	Categories	n	Percentage/Mean
Fertility intention	No intention	47619	55.69%
	Low intention	14989	17.53%
	High intention	22895	26.78%
Husband's participation in housework	No	55226	64.59%
	Yes	30277	35.41%
Age			37.70
Parity	Parity 0	12796	14.97%
	Parity 1	25383	29.69%
	Parity 2	25668	30.02%
	Parity 2+	21656	25.33%
Type of residence	Rural	49077	57.40%
	Urban	36426	42.60%
	Jawa	20780	24.30%
Island	Sumatera	24338	28.46%
	Bali dan Nusa Tenggara	6917	8.09%
	Kalimantan	7544	8.82%
	Sulawesi	12125	14.18%
	Maluku dan Papua	13799	16.14%
	Primary or below (ref)	31537	36.88%
Wife's education	Secondary	16316	19.08%
	High	24933	29.16%
	Tertiary	12717	14.87%
	Primary or below (ref)	31075	36.34%
Husband's education	Secondary	14711	17.21%
	High	28303	33.10%
	Tertiary	11414	13.35%
Employment status	Not working	40766	47.68%
	Informal worker	29379	34.36%
	Formal worker	15358	17.96%

Tabel 2. Percentage of fertility intention based on husband's involvement in the household and parity

Variable	Fertility intention			Total
	No Intention	Low Intention	High Intention	
Husband's Participation in Housework				
Not Participating	57.5%	17.3%	25.3%	100,0
Participating	52.5%	18.0%	29.5%	100,0
Parity				
Parity 0	37.3%	6.7%	56.0%	100,0
Parity 1	40.7%	20.9%	38.4%	100,0
Parity 2	62.0%	21.1%	16.9%	100,0
Parity 2+	76.6%	15.8%	7.6%	100,0

**Figure 1.** Fertility intention and husband participation in housework by parity

When considering parity and a husband's participation in housework, women generally have higher fertility intentions when their husbands participate in housework. Conversely, women with no intention of having more children were more prevalent in households where their husbands did not participate in housework. This pattern is consistent across all parity categories, from zero to more than two children. Thus, descriptively, there is a relationship between husbands' participation in household chores and women's decisions to have additional children.

Table 3. Result of the logistic ordinal regression analysis

Variable	Coef	st. error	Odds ratio	95% CI	p-value
Husband's housework					
No (ref)			reference		
Yes	0.14	(0.02)	1.15	1.12 - 1.19	<0.001
Age	-0.13	(0.01)	0.87	0.87 - 0.88	<0.001
Parity					
Parity 0 (ref)			reference		
Parity 1	-0.75	(0.03)	0.47	0.45 - 0.49	<0.001
Parity 2	-1.66	(0.03)	0.19	0.18 - 0.20	<0.001
Parity 2+	-2.09	(0.03)	0.12	0.12 - 0.13	<0.001
Status working					
Not working (ref)			reference		
Informal worker	0.14	(0.02)	1.15	1.11 - 1.19	<0.001
Formal worker	0.22	(0.02)	1.24	1.19 - 1.30	<0.001
Wife education					
Primary or below (ref)			reference		
Secondary	0.12	(0.02)	1.13	1.08 - 1.18	<0.001
High	0.17	(0.02)	1.19	1.14 - 1.24	<0.001
Tertiary	0.38	(0.03)	1.46	1.38 - 1.55	<0.001
Husband's education					
Primary or below (ref)			reference		
Secondary	0.03	(0.02)	1.03	0.99 - 1.08	0.157
High	-0.01	(0.02)	0.99	0.95 - 1.04	0.794
Tertiary	0.01	(0.03)	1.00	0.94 - 1.06	0.916
Wealth quintile					
Poorest (ref)			reference		
Poorer	-0.09	(0.02)	0.91	0.84 - 1.04	<0.001
Middle	-0.13	(0.03)	0.90	0.90 - 1.02	<0.001
Richer	-0.16	(0.03)	0.89	0.83 - 0.94	<0.001
Richest	-0.24	(0.03)	0.89	0.82 - 0.94	<0.001
Island					
Jawa (ref)			reference		
Sumatera	0.10	(0.02)	1.10	1.06 - 1.15	<0.001
Bali dan Nusa Tenggara	0.07	(0.03)	1.07	1.01 - 1.13	<0.030
Kalimantan	-0.06	(0.03)	0.94	0.89 - 1.00	<0.039
Sulawesi	0.21	(0.03)	1.23	1.17 - 1.30	<0.001
Maluku dan Papua	-0.20	(0.03)	0.82	0.78 - 0.86	<0.001
Type of residence					
Rural (ref)			reference		
Urban	-0.22	(0.02)	0.80	0.77 - 0.83	<0.001
cut1			-5.72		
cut2			-4.62		
N			85,503		
r2			0.193		
G			77.14		
prob			<0.001		

Table 3 shows that a husband's participation in housework is significantly linked to fertility intentions. In the first model, after controlling for demographic and socio-economic factors, a husband's involvement in housework positively affects the fertility intentions of women aged 15–49 who are married and living with their husbands. Women whose husbands participate in housework are 1.14 times more likely to have higher fertility intentions compared to those whose husbands do not, with all other variables held constant. This indicates that couples where the husband is involved

in housework tend to have a stronger desire to have children within the next two years, compared to couples where the husband is not involved in housework.

Each additional year of a woman's age is associated with a 13% decrease in the likelihood of having higher fertility intentions, which aligns with the general decline in fertility due to both biological and socio-psychological factors. Parity also significantly negatively affects fertility intentions. The odds ratio for the variable of having one child (0.47) indicates that women with one child are 0.47 times less likely to have higher fertility intentions compared to women without children. This means that as the number of children a woman has increases, her fertility intentions decrease. These findings suggest a strong negative relationship between the number of existing children and the desire for additional children.

Women with higher education levels are more likely to have higher fertility intentions. Those with a university degree are 1.46 times more likely to have higher fertility intentions compared to those with only an elementary school education or less. In contrast, the education level of husbands does not significantly influence fertility intentions. Women in households within the second quintile (lower middle class) are 0.91 times less likely to have high fertility intentions compared to those in the lowest quintile. Similarly, women in households in the highest quintile (wealthiest) are 0.89 times less likely to have high fertility intentions compared to those in the lowest quintile. Women's employment status also significantly impacts fertility intentions. Women working in the informal sector are 1.15 times more likely to have high fertility intentions compared to non-working women, while those employed in the formal sector are 1.24 times more likely to have high fertility intentions compared to non-working women, assuming all other factors remain constant.

Geographically, women living on islands outside of Java are generally more likely to have higher fertility intentions in the next two years, with the exception of Kalimantan, Maluku, and Papua. Women in Sumatra are 1.10 times more likely to have high fertility intentions compared to women in Java. Similarly, women in Bali and Nusa Tenggara are 1.07 times more likely, while women in Sulawesi are 1.23 times more likely, to have high fertility intentions compared to those in Java. In terms of residency, women living in urban areas are 0.80 times less likely to have high fertility intentions compared to women in rural areas. This suggests that women in urban areas are less likely to plan to have children in the next two years than women in rural areas.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that a husband's participation in housework is significantly related to the desire to have more children. Women who live with husbands actively involved in housework tend to have a higher intention to have additional children. This result is supported by bivariate analysis, which shows that a greater percentage of women with high fertility intentions have

husbands who participate in housework. This suggests that a husband's involvement plays a key role in shaping women's fertility intentions. In households where the husband contributes to domestic duties, women are more likely to consider having more children, regardless of how many children they already have. This may be because, in many Indonesian households, women still bear the "double burden" of working outside the home while being fully responsible for domestic tasks and childcare. When husbands share in housework, it lightens this burden, allowing women to feel more capable of handling the challenges of having additional children.¹⁵ UNFPA also found that young couples in Indonesia who share household responsibilities more equally tend to have a stronger desire to have a second child.¹⁵

Studies have shown that egalitarian gender roles, including men's participation in housework, are linked to greater alignment in fertility preferences and intentions between spouses. These findings suggest that shared responsibilities foster greater cooperation in family planning. Zhang et al. found that a husband's involvement in housework significantly increases a woman's desire to have children.⁶ Their analysis indicates that when husbands actively participate in housework, it reduces work-family conflict for wives, boosts their satisfaction with their husbands' contributions, and enhances their overall happiness and desire to have children. Similarly, Kan et al. demonstrated that a husband's involvement in housework is not only related to his own fertility intentions but also to those of his partner. As husbands become more engaged in domestic tasks, women are more likely to express a higher ideal number of children compared to those whose husbands are less involved. This supports the gender revolution framework, which argues that increased male participation in housework positively influences fertility intentions.^{16,17}

From a socio-demographic perspective, factors such as women's age, parity, education levels, husband's education, wealth quintile, employment status, type of residence, and geographic region significantly influence the intention to have children. As explained by Preis et al., a woman's fertility intentions typically decline once she has one or more children.¹⁸ Education has an important effect on determining fertility intentions, as noted by Kan and Zhang et al., who identify education as a key socioeconomic factor affecting reproductive behavior. Higher education opens up better job opportunities, and with improved employment prospects, women are more likely to feel confident about having children or additional children.^{6,19,20} Moreover, women with higher education levels tend to marry later, and this lower parity at marriage increases the likelihood of having children. The education level of their partners reveals similar patterns. Research on fertility behavior in Italy shows that couples with higher education levels are more likely to express a desire to have children.²¹ Studies also indicate that women with highly educated partners are more likely to want more children than those whose partners have lower education levels. Higher education level in a partner often

translates into better job prospects, improving the household's economic situation, which may, in turn, increase both the woman's and her partner's desire to have children or more children.²²

From an economic perspective, a household's economic condition greatly influences its fertility intentions. Research shows that women living in households with higher socioeconomic status are less likely to intend to have children within the next two years compared to women in lower-income households. Fertility theory suggests that higher socioeconomic status generally leads to fewer children.^{6,23} This is because women in wealthier households are more likely to prioritize the quality of their children over their quantity, focusing more on improving their children's well-being and opportunities than increasing their number.²⁴

Women's employment status also influences their fertility intentions. Women who work, whether in the formal or informal sector, generally have lower fertility intentions, particularly regarding having children within the next two years, compared to women who do not work. Working women are more likely to face a higher opportunity cost when it comes to having and raising children, making them less inclined to expand their families or have more children. This finding aligns with research by Wu et al., which suggests that employed women tend to have fewer children to compete effectively in the labor market.²⁵ The prospect of having more children can negatively impact their career performance, potentially reducing their wages. Additionally, gender equality in the public sphere often leads to lower fertility intentions, especially when it is not mirrored by gender equality within the family. High gender equality at work, paired with low gender equality at home, can result in lower birth rates.^{2,3,7} The imbalance between gender equality in the public and private spheres can create a negative relationship between egalitarianism and fertility intentions.⁴ Therefore, it is important to examine gender equality within the family, with a wife's employment status as a proxy for gender equality in the public sphere.

From a geographical perspective, place of residence plays a significant role in influencing fertility intentions in Indonesia. This assertion is supported by findings from the 2020 Population Census, which revealed that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is higher outside Java compared to Java, indicating stronger fertility intentions in regions beyond Java. Cultural factors also contribute to these regional differences in fertility intentions. Bano et al. explain that married women living in provinces with higher TFR are more likely to have higher fertility intentions compared to those in provinces with lower TFR.²⁶ Moreover, women living in urban areas are more likely to not want children, as the opportunity cost of raising them is higher in urban than rural areas.²⁷ The lower cost of living in rural areas, combined with the rural social norm that "many children bring prosperity," helps explain the differences in fertility intentions between urban and rural areas.

CONCLUSION

This study found that a husband's participation in housework has a significant impact on women's fertility intentions in Indonesia. Women whose husbands participate in housework are more likely to intend to have children compared to women whose husbands do not participate. These findings indicate that gender equality within the family, particularly husbands' participation in housework, has a major impact on reproductive decision-making. This evidence also indicates that the husband's participation in housework can reduce work-family conflict, increase the woman's satisfaction with the husband's contributions, and strengthen the woman's intention to have more children. Demographic factors such as women's age, parity, the education level of both the woman and her partner, the woman's employment status, and the household's socioeconomic status also influence fertility intentions. Overall, this study reveals the importance of the husband's participation in housework, along with demographic, socio-economic, and geographic factors that influence women's fertility intentions in Indonesia.

RECOMMENDATION

Promoting gender equality within the household should be recognized as a strategic approach to stabilizing fertility intentions. Policymakers are encouraged to incorporate gender equality in the family sphere, acknowledging the influence of husbands' participation in housework on reproductive decisions. To support this, national and local governments—working in collaboration with institutions such as BKKBN and the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection—should implement targeted public campaigns that promote the value of shared responsibility in parenting and housework. These efforts should challenge the notion that childrearing is solely a woman's duty and instead highlight how shared housework contributes to healthier, happier, and more resilient families. Furthermore, workplaces should be encouraged to adopt family-friendly policies that enable fathers to be more actively involved in housework, including paternity leave, flexible working hours, and supportive corporate cultures. Such incentives can help dismantle entrenched gender norms and foster long-term behavioral change that supports both family well-being.

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Declarations

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