

Experience with Household Management Research in the Field of Unpaid Work

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Abstract: Unpaid work is a part of everyday life in all households; however, its scope and structure vary significantly across countries. Research on household management and unpaid work has shown that not only the duration of unpaid work matters, but also how it is organized and managed within the household. This article builds on a pilot study (2021) and explores the connection between household management and unpaid work activities, explaining the shift in researching this topic in the main phase of the ongoing study, which aims to achieve deeper results and better sampling techniques compared to the pilot survey. In this article, we use literature review methods and the historical-logical method. Preliminary findings suggest that households make limited use of more advanced management strategies when organizing unpaid work. The article also discusses the advantages and limitations of the survey design, aiming to contribute to the broader academic debate on the methodological and conceptual challenges of researching unpaid work.

Keywords: household, management, time use, unpaid work.

JEL classification: D10, D13

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Introduction

The household environment has long been the subject of inquiry across various academic disciplines, including economics, sociology, psychology, and others. This interdisciplinary interest stems from the fact that households consist of individuals who, through both internal and external interactions, engage in a wide range of social relationships. The societal role of households is indispensable, and a deeper understanding of this environment is not only scientifically and professionally enriching but also essential, particularly considering the diverse public policies that exert influence on households from the outside.

The lack of a well-developed theoretical framework for household management - as a complex process situated within contemporary societal challenges in a rapidly evolving world – represents a critical gap in research that warrants greater attention, also in the Slovak context. It is necessary to incorporate the impact of technological innovations and their potential to reshape household management.

This article aims to explore the relationship between unpaid work and household management, present the research methodology, and introduce ongoing research activities in the Slovak Republic. Household management is understood here as a broad concept encompassing decision-making across various aspects of household members' lives, including paid employment. However, the focus of this study is specifically on household management as it

relates to the organization and coordination of unpaid work. While we acknowledge that decisions around unpaid work are closely intertwined with the demands and constraints of paid employment, the analysis is intentionally limited to unpaid work to better capture its specific dynamics and implications.

The management of unpaid work constitutes a fundamental aspect of everyday life, significantly contributing to the formation of social relationships, the reproduction of gender roles, and the overall quality of life of individuals. Considering broader societal changes, the importance of the research in this area increases, particularly considering the dynamic shifts in household structures, changes in labour market and working conditions, and changes in gender roles. Although domestic work is carried out in most households and represents a cornerstone of household functioning, it remains largely unrecognized as a form of productive activity in public discourse and policy.

Practical aspects of household management represent a complex problem and more robust analysis based on empirical data and insights from real household settings is needed. The changing structure of households – such as the increasing share of single-person households, the growing prevalence of informal partnerships, and population aging – all introduce new context that shapes the unpaid work management.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated several social processes in Slovakia and significantly affected the dynamics of the household environment. Increased reliance on the home office working regime, the closure of educational institutions, and restrictions on social life intensified the demands placed on the organization of household activities. The post-pandemic economic context – characterized by higher inflation and rising living costs.

Current research of the household management and unpaid work in Slovakia, however, remains fragmented and largely limited to partial findings. There is a notable absence of empirically grounded studies that comprehensively address both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of household management. We would like to stress the importance of gathering the household management into the interdisciplinary research framework, which would offer greater potential for understanding of the processes and dynamics of household management.

In the following sections of this article, we try to characterize the nature of domestic (unpaid) work, analysing the concept of household management. Our findings are framed by a sociological characteristic of Slovak households, with an aim to introduce possible research framework designed to examine these two interrelated topics in the current Slovak context.

2 Theoretical backgrounds of unpaid work and household management

Unpaid work activities are closely tied to the household space, though they may also be carried out outside of it (for another household). In general, it can be stated that unpaid work is performed in most households, varying in scope, structure, quality, and mode of execution. As Považanová (2016, in Uramová, Orviská et al. 2016) notes: “Although numerous definitions of unpaid work can be found in the literature, their core understanding remains more or less consistent—unpaid work refers to intentional, productive activities undertaken by households outside the formal labour market, for which the provider receives no financial compensation.”

Hirway (1999) introduces the list of unpaid work activities officially assessed across European countries: meal preparation; housework such as cleaning; production and maintenance of textiles; gardening; pet care; repair and maintenance of furniture and vehicles; shopping and

related services; care of farm animals; construction and renovation; childcare; adult care; and volunteer work.

Studying the scope and structure of unpaid work within households can contribute to a better understanding of gender inequality, as women are most often the primary providers of unpaid work. Identifying the extent and motivations behind unpaid work can also shed light on why many households struggle to ensure equal opportunities for all their members. Unpaid work is intrinsically linked to the allocation of time, energy, and effort that household members are willing or able to devote to it. For economically active individuals, unpaid work may constitute a barrier to achieving a sustainable balance between domestic responsibilities, paid employment, and leisure time.

Understanding the interrelations between unpaid and paid work has the potential to reveal the overall quality of life of household members and the household as a social unit. Unpaid work not only has a microeconomic dimension within society but also significant macroeconomic implications. By recognizing the value of unpaid work through appropriate methodological approaches, it is possible to more accurately reflect overall economic performance - including this type of activity, which is typically excluded from standard measures such as GDP.

Conducting regular empirical research on unpaid work can enhance the effectiveness of public policy interventions that affect households in various ways - such as social policy, family policy, or labour market policy. Slovak Republic is touched by the global trend of population aging. This means that identifying challenges associated with unpaid work in senior-headed households, or in households where adult care is provided, could generate valuable insights for institutional care providers and external stakeholders and help to adapt the social services for the citizens.

Although the measurement of the value of unpaid domestic work has historically been omitted from national accounts, attempts to propose alternative assessment methods date back to the 1920s. In the 1970s, feminist movements in Belgium, France, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States popularized the issue by advocating for “wages” for household work. Feminist economists later attempted to legitimize the issue scientifically, starting with the first feminist caucus at the American Economic Association (AEA) conference in 1990 (Nelson 1995).

The first official data on unpaid work was published by the OECD in 2011 in the report *Cooking, Caring and Volunteering: Unpaid Work Around the World*. This report draws on detailed data from Time Use Surveys conducted in 25 OECD member countries and 3 emerging economies. The findings suggest that unpaid work constitutes approximately one-third to one-half of all economically valuable activities in these countries, yet it remains unaccounted for in conventional indicators such as GDP.

In Slovakia, the first complex representative survey aimed at measuring the extent of unpaid work was conducted in 2012.¹ This period may be considered a milestone in the study of unpaid work in Slovakia, not only from an economic perspective. A more systematic interpretation and

¹ This survey was part of a research project funded by the VEGA grant scheme titled The Labour Market in the Context of the Specifics of Unpaid Work: Measuring Its Extent and Impact on Households, the Business Sector, and the Economy.

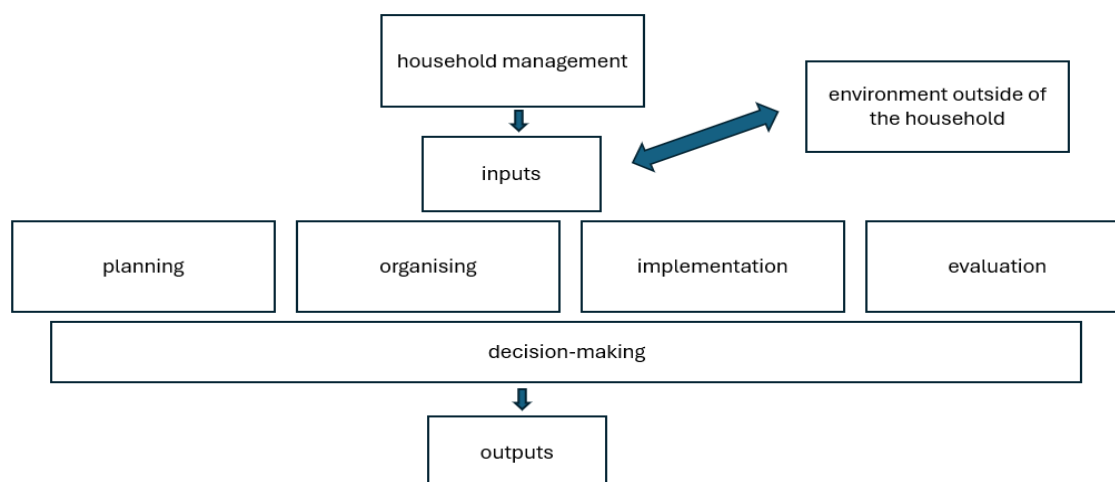
analysis of unpaid work in Slovakia is presented in the collective monograph *Unpaid Work in Slovakia* (Uramová, Orviská et al. 2016).

Research in the field of unpaid work evolves and addresses various aspects of household management reflecting the broader dynamics of societal development. Meraviglia and Dudka (2020) focused on the division of domestic work between partners in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jokubauskaitė, Hössinger, Jara-Díaz et al. (2022) analysed how unpaid work contributes to gender disparities in the perception of leisure time. A systematic investigation into gender differences in the relationship between unpaid work and mental health among employed adults was conducted by Ervin et al. (2022), with results indicating that unpaid work has a more negative impact on women's mental health compared to men. Alonso et al. (2019) explored policies aimed at reducing and redistributing unpaid work across genders, promoting gender equality and enhancing productivity.

Unpaid work should not be understood merely as a set of routine or mechanical tasks but rather as a complex system of decision-making and managerial processes related to household management. Household management has been widely addressed in scholarly literature and academic discourse, often under the term "home economics." The theoretical foundations of household management can be traced back to the late 19th century. One of the pioneers in this field was Maria Parloa, an American author of practical household and nutrition manuals. In her work *Household Management and Cookery* (1879), Parloa was among the first to systematically elaborate the concept of "household management," laying the groundwork for subsequent professional discussions on managing everyday life within the home. Her publication served as a practical guide offering specific recommendations on efficient household operation – from nutrition and hygiene to spatial organization and rational use of resources – with the overarching aim of equipping people with knowledge and skills for healthier and more efficient living environments. Generally, this opened the era in which questions of household management are analysed in a normative mode, connected to the educational potential. We can say that this mode dominated the research until the late 70'.

Deacon and Firebaugh (1988) proposed an ecosystemic approach to household management, conceptualizing it as a rational and goal-oriented system. This system interacts continuously with its external environment, processing inputs and generating outputs. Inputs may include resources, needs, or goals, and are divided into two basic subsystems within the family: the personal subsystem and the managerial subsystem. The personal subsystem focuses on individual development, the formation and clarification of values. Values, abilities, skills, and attitudes developed in this subsystem significantly influence what the family is willing and able to accomplish. The managerial subsystem, on the other hand, involves planning and implementation activities. Planning entails the establishment of standards and procedures to achieve set goals, including identifying needs to be met and evaluating available resources. Implementation occurs through activation (putting plans into practice) and control (monitoring execution and adjusting plans as necessary). A key element of this model is decision-making, which permeates all phases of the management process. According to this approach, the entire management process is designed to enhance the quality of life in the household, a notion also supported by Duncan et al. (2000), who emphasize that effective managerial activities positively influence overall living conditions. To provide a clear overview of household management functioning, Figure 1 has been developed.

Figure 1: A theoretical perspective of household management



Source: Own processing according to Deacon and Firebaugh (1988)

Research on household management also encompasses unpaid work, with attention paid to its various dimensions. Several studies explore how such tasks are distributed among household members, how unpaid work is managed, and how this affects household well-being. Recent academic contributions in this area have served as an inspiration for contemporary research in Slovakia. For example, Milkie, Nomaguchi, and Yan (2025) examined shifts in the division of domestic labour and childcare in the U.S., finding that gender disparities in unpaid work, such as cooking and cleaning, decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Larraz et al. (2023) similarly reported that the pandemic influenced the division of domestic tasks in Spain, leading to reduced gender disparities during lockdown. Beigi et al. (2024) investigated the management of domestic tasks and professional responsibilities in dual-earner households with school-aged children during the pandemic, highlighting the importance of equitable distribution of household duties. Hertog et al. (2023) estimated that automation could reduce time spent on unpaid work by 50–60%, potentially having a profound effect on gender equality and employment. Altman and Humberd (2023) explored how emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, and autonomous vehicles may affect the gendered division of domestic labour, particularly in terms of reducing women’s mental workload.

Research on management with respect to unpaid work has also been conducted in Slovakia. Kuruc et al. (2022) analysed the impact of unpaid household work on women’s careers and mental health. Bednárík et al. (2021) focused on new forms of remote work (especially during the pandemic) and their effects on household functioning and the division of family responsibilities.

The topic of managing unpaid household work has gained increasing significance worldwide in recent years across various contexts. Scientific studies largely reflect the transformative events of recent years, which have had – and continue to have – a profound influence on household dynamics. Research in this area frequently considers the specific national conditions that most directly shape the household environment from the outside.

These recent events and ongoing developments served as our motivation to deepen our understanding not only of the current extent and structure of unpaid work in Slovakia but also of its management processes. Given that the national context, cultural norms, and historical development are inherently linked to the functioning of households, the following section of

this paper offers a sociological perspective on Slovak households and subsequently outlines the methodological approach adopted for investigating the management of unpaid work in post-pandemic conditions.

When discussing the management of Slovak households, one cannot overlook the fact that a substantial portion of these households are family-based units. The issue of their functioning is therefore closely linked to the dynamics of the Slovak family. The spheres of family and work are deeply interconnected. Numerous factors influence the functioning of families and households – such as religiosity, place of residence (e.g., urban vs. rural), perceptions of gender roles, generational cultural behaviour patterns, the age and number of children in the household, and the form of paid employment (e. g., commuting, working hours, type of work performed). The value orientation of families is also significant, especially concerning child-rearing practices.

For example, Kusá and Orišková (2018), drawing on data from the European Values Study (EVS), demonstrate that in Slovakia, there is a prevailing tendency to prioritize educational values that emphasize individual performance and achievement as key qualities for harmonious coexistence. This trend seems to be stronger in Slovakia than in the neighbouring Czech Republic.

The socio-economic status of households is a key determinant of their functioning. According to the 2023 EU SILC survey, 17.3% of households in Slovakia are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. (Vlačuha, Kubala 2024) This risk is particularly high among so-called single-parent households and those with multiple children. The income poverty gap (measured as 60% of median income) between households with and without children is one of the highest in the EU and significantly exceeds the EU average. In 2022, this difference reached 10.7% (Kusá, Orišková 2018, 8). The 2021 Population and housing census identified nearly 4,000 families in Slovakia that can be classified as homeless – families that utilize various types of temporary accommodation and often move between them - encompassing approximately 7,000 children. (Podmanická 2023, 16)

Moreover, according to the latest values of the European Domestic Energy Poverty Index, Slovakia ranks among the EU countries most affected by energy poverty, alongside Hungary and Bulgaria (Geist 2023).

Unemployment or poverty also has a subjective dimension, often leading to feelings of insignificance and social disintegration of the self. However, research by Kusá, Konečná, and Orišková (2023, 78) shows that “The lived world of the family can, even after the loss of employment and a decrease in income, serve as an important barrier and space of resistance against the process of becoming socially insignificant. This capacity stems, in part, from the recognition and support that close and 'most significant' others are able to provide one another in return for care and effort devoted to maintaining the family.” This includes unpaid domestic work. Their qualitative research found that “descriptions of performing domestic provisioning activities were also associated with experiences of autonomy, reflections on one’s own efficacy and capabilities, and the experience of self-esteem.”

Statistically, the family is typically one type of the census household unit. Population censuses distinguish "complete families" comprising married or cohabiting couples with or without children and "incomplete families" consisting of one parent (either mother or father) and the child/children. If multiple generations of the same family live in a household, they form one

family through biological ties, but statistically, one household, complete or incomplete, is formed by the two youngest generations, and separate household is formed from the older generations. This conceptualization allows for the analysis of families using census data. (Ivančíková, Podmanická 2023).

In Slovakia, the predominant household type is the nuclear family (parent(s) and child/children) – accounting for 60% of households, with 45% being complete and 15% single-parent households. However, multigenerational families cohabiting in a single household (e.g., grandparents, parents, and grandchildren) still exist. There is a growing number of single-person households (primarily elderly individuals or young adults in urban areas – 35%) and childless partnerships. In 2021, the average number of members per household was 2.6. (Ivančíková, Podmanická 2023).

Household structure in Slovakia is also shaped by demographic trends, notably declining fertility and population aging. These contribute to a decrease in the number of large families and an increase in elderly households. Rising divorce rates are associated with an increase in single-parent families as well as so-called "patchwork families," in which children shuttle between multiple households.

The Slovak household still performs essential practical roles – it remains the basic economic unit, plays a key role in caring for children and elderly family members, fulfils educational and socialization functions (transmitting values and norms), and nowadays is increasingly focused on providing emotional support. Unlike in the past, when the dissolution of a family was typically triggered by serious external problems such as violence, addiction, or infidelity, a large part of family breakdowns today results from the loss of emotional connection — when the family or partnership no longer fulfils its emotional function. Differences between urban and rural areas are clearly visible and can be linked to differing cultural orientations. In rural settings, certain traditional patterns of behaviour persist — such as earlier marriages and larger families — patterns that have largely disappeared in urban environments. Stronger family ties also tend to endure in rural areas, reflected, for example, in a higher level of care for elderly household members within the family context. Rural households are more likely to retain a productive function as well — gardens and small farms are part of the local lifestyle but also serve as a means of securing or supplementing household income, whether in financial terms or through in-kind contributions. In contrast, urban areas are dominated by nuclear and single-person households, with a higher prevalence of unmarried partnerships.

3 Methodology for researching the management of unpaid work in Slovakia under post-pandemic conditions

Since the beginning of 2024, the research team of the VEGA project – focused on investigating the management of unpaid work –and prepared a comprehensive survey aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the current state of this issue in Slovakia. One of the principal challenges for the team was to develop a research methodology that would advance current knowledge and at the same time to grasp the essential aspects of the topic so that the data would be comparable to previous research findings in Slovakia and abroad. Thus, the research design was structured into several phases that would result into relevant empirical findings.

The analysis presented in this article is based on the theoretical framework of Deacon and Firebaugh (1988), specifically its visualization in Figure 1, which serves as the foundation for further exploration. These will represent preliminary findings aimed at analyzing households in Slovakia by applying household management theory, with a specific focus on unpaid work. We

also draw on previous research experiences that examined the scope and structure of unpaid work in Slovakia, for example in the years 2012, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

To explore the current state of unpaid work management in Slovakia, the research team designed a questionnaire consisted of 83 questions divided into several parts. The research sample aimed at addressing respondents aged 15 and older, which results from the practical applicability together with the aim to grasp different age group with different positions in the households. The research applies the “post-hoc” representative sampling. Which means we did not aspire to ensure representativity in advance but at the end we plan to evaluate the representativity of our sample regarding the basic socio-demographic characteristics of Slovak population with possible weighing of the data.² The initial intention that seems to be fulfilled was to approach the sample close to the 1 000 respondents which is usual number of representative samplings in Slovakia considering whole Slovak population. To test the questions and research methodology, we applied initial pilot survey in 2021 that consisted of 30 households. Our evaluation was enriched by the possibility for respondents to give final feedback (e. g. concerning comprehensibility of the questions). Experiences from the pilot survey were used in designing the main questionnaire within the more extensive survey conducted in the first half of the 2025.

The 2021 pilot survey reinforced the research team’s belief in the applicability of household management conceptualisation we used, with minor modifications, to the domain of unpaid work. Preliminary findings from a pilot survey revealed that only few of the households examined in the survey regularly engage in pre-planning of the task and prepare more sophisticated responsibility distribution together with post hoc evaluation of the quality of unpaid domestic work. Only one fifth of the households coordinate their domestic activities in an organized manner, exhibiting characteristics of more complex management practices. The survey, however, did not explore it in more detail, e. g. we don’t know whether this planned approach varies depending on the type of domestic tasks being performed, or whether it relates to the specific phase of the life cycle of the households. Approximately two-fifths of the households engage in domestic work in an ad hoc manner, with irregular task distribution and without any subsequent evaluation of the quality domestic tasks and management. Compared to the first group, these households pay less attention to the management of domestic tasks, but do not omit it completely. Two thirds of the sample seem to consciously disregard the management and organization of domestic tasks, instead adopting a spontaneous approach to the domestic tasks. In these cases, tasks are not planned, responsibilities are assigned randomly (i.e., tasks are performed by whoever is available now), and there is no systematic evaluation of performance or quality. To understand reasons of the placing of the household within the continuum of sophisticated organisation on one hand and complete neglecting of any planning on the other hand, would require a more profound investigation (e. g. in-depth qualitative interviews) aimed at explaining the rationale and contextual factors influencing such managerial behaviour.

We can conclude that, although the approach to the household management lies to the large extent to the private sphere of the individuals and families, and should not be the subject of judgement and normativity, mainly in case of the households that completely neglect any planning of domestic tasks we can assume that better organisation and planning could lead to improvement in the overall quality of life of members of these households. Unorganised approach in performing of domestic tasks is often connected with lack of planning in financial

² This question will be carefully considered and discussed since the data weighting brings several methodological problems.

management and can lead to more serious problems such as indebtedness of the households which is relatively high in Slovakia.³ This insight served as a motivating factor for conducting a broader survey that would examine approaches to household management more deeply using bigger and more relevant research sample.⁴

Several preparatory steps preceded the final version of the questionnaire that is currently in use for gathering empirical data on unpaid work and household management in Slovakia. The questionnaire is structured into two main parts: each divided into specific thematic sections. The first part addresses the characteristics of unpaid work (e. g., types of activities, structure, and weekly time allocation). This section also incorporates questions reflecting international experiences, particularly regarding the influence of modern technologies and trends that may affect both the organization and execution of unpaid work. The survey investigated the average weekly extent of unpaid work performed in one's own household (alternatively also in another household) as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Unpaid work activities

| Unpaid work activities |
|---------------------------------------|
| Household cleaning |
| Meal preparation |
| Shopping and services |
| Animal care |
| Textile production and maintenance |
| Gardening |
| Repairs and maintenance |
| Household management and organization |
| Digital education |
| Childcare |
| Adult care |

Source: Own processing

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on examining the management of unpaid work in households in Slovakia. Compared to the initial pilot survey on the management of household work conducted in 2021, the current survey includes multiple questions related to each managerial function (as explained in the Figure 1), enabling us to identify whether households plan domestic tasks, who is involved in the planning, which tools households use for planning, and so forth. Regarding the examination of management in unpaid domestic work, we developed Figure 1. In the context of organizing, we investigate who within the household organizes the domestic tasks/ who is the main person responsible for household management, what household members consider important in household management functioning, and what helps them to improve organization of housework. Our ambition is to examine in more detail the individual managerial strategies employed (or not employed) within housework. Compared to the 2021 survey, the research methodology allows us a more detailed evaluation of the use of individual household management functions. Moreover, the survey results will enable us to find out whether the households use modern or smart technologies in housework and housework planning and what motivations stand behind.

³ In December 2024, Slovak households' gross debt-to-income ratio stood at 68.9 %, down slightly from 69.2 % in 2023, with a historical peak of 72.5 % in 2021 (Trading Economics).

⁴ In this phase of research, sampling was conducted on an individual basis, rather than at the household level. Accordingly, we did not seek to include all members of a particular household but rather gathered accounts from individuals regarding their experiences and perspectives on the households to which they belong and in which they engage in unpaid labour.

Prior to the launch of the full-scale survey in March 2025, the research team conducted testing aimed at verifying the logical structure of the questionnaire, the clarity of the questions, and the adequacy of the answer options.⁵ The research team's ambition was to collect approximately 1 000 questionnaires, which constitutes a standard sample size meeting the requirements for a basic representative sample⁶ for the whole Slovak population. The limitations of representativity were already mentioned and relate to post-hoc representativity testing with initial use of the snowball sampling method for the distribution of questionnaires (using the help of the students of the Faculty of Economics with the possibility to gather into the sample their households and households of their relatives, which of course cannot be understood as random selection, on the other hand nowadays the university students come from various social backgrounds and the risk of inquiring only higher classes is relatively lower than would have been in the past, moreover the distribution was realised also through alternative channels, e.g. social networks).⁷

Given that the field of unpaid work management remains largely unexplored in Slovakia, the survey results are expected to identify types of households where issues in unpaid work organization are most prevalent. These insights may serve as a stimulus for further research or targeted policy interventions. While the team acknowledges the methodological limitations inherent in their approach, they note that similar methods are commonly applied in related studies internationally.

After approximately three months of the data collection, we can bring some preliminary observations. More women than men participated in the survey. The higher participation of women may reflect their greater engagement in the unpaid work connected with the persistent gender inequalities, as women in Slovak households still bear greater responsibility for caring for the home, children, and other household members. Most respondents belong to a younger age group, mainly students who mostly live with their parents, indicating that a significant portion of the young population engaged in the educational process took part in the study. Another significant part of the sample consists of economically active individuals, whether working full-time or part-time, as well as self-employed persons. Groups such as the unemployed, parents on maternity or parental leave, pensioners, and other socially or economically fewer active persons are represented to a lesser extent in the sample. Overall, young people living in multi-member households and working individuals dominate our survey, while less active social groups form a minority. Considering basic contexts of the research this can be considered relevant for analysing problems of household management such as work life balance, distribution of housework between members.

The research findings will be gradually disseminated to the broader academic community through scholarly articles, professional presentations, and workshops. Some results will also enable comparison with previous surveys, particularly those conducted during and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for an initial indication of temporal changes in unpaid work patterns. The interdisciplinary composition of the research team creates opportunities for cross-

⁵ This phase was carried out in January and February 2025. During testing, the team finalized the content and technical questions of the online version of the questionnaire, which is currently (May 2025) in process of gathering the data.

⁶ Reflecting basic sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, region etc.

⁷ The methodological limitations of representativity will be considered during interpretation which is, by the way, very important aspect of ensuring scientific approach, to avoid inappropriate generalisations and to respect the limits of the data.

sectional interpretation of the findings, thus contributing to a more comprehensive assessment of the current state of unpaid work management in Slovak households.

Conclusion

Emerging findings indicate that the issue of managing unpaid work within households represents a complex and multidisciplinary research domain that merits systematic scholarly and scientific attention. As the fundamental micro-unit of society, the household not only ensures the provision of essential care – such as for children and dependent adults – reproduction, and emotional support, but it also faces a range of external pressures, including economic instability, evolving social structures, and technological and demographic transformations. The unpaid work carried out daily within households holds both microeconomic and macroeconomic significance.

From the perspective of gender equality, the topic of household work management is intrinsically linked to persistent inequalities between women and men, as evidenced by numerous studies conducted both in Slovakia and internationally. Recent developments, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted the necessity for more flexible and equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities, which tend to become even more pronounced during times of crisis. It is precisely in periods of uncertainty and increased household burden that the importance of effective planning, coordination, and evaluation of household activities becomes most apparent.

From a theoretical standpoint, it is therefore essential to further develop interdisciplinary approaches that integrate economic, sociological, psychological, and managerial perspectives. Inspiration can be drawn not only from the historical foundations of home economics, but also from contemporary approaches that conceptualize the household as a system operating under resource constraints. A significant challenge in the Slovak context, however, remains the lack of empirical data that would allow for a more detailed observation of changes in household organization and the performance of unpaid work.

For these reasons, the ongoing research conducted within the VEGA project is of considerable importance. Its aim is not only to map the current state of unpaid work management in Slovak households, but also to contribute to the development of more effective public policies that reflect the everyday realities of domestic life. The findings of this research may also serve as a foundation for further studies focused on assessing the impact of technological innovations, shifts in household structures, and the growing relevance of mental health in the context of domestic work. Without an adequate understanding and recognition of this sphere, an essential dimension of social life remains obscured by formal economic indicators – an analytical and policy gap that calls for rigorous, interdisciplinary research to be meaningfully addressed.

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