

Gender, Ethnicity and Unpaid Domestic Work Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in mandatory work-from-home arrangements and the closure of schools and daycare centres, placing an additional burden on families. Using an online survey carried out during the second Movement Control Order in January 2021, this survey was about who is responsible for housework and childcare work and the subjective time pressure, spare time and satisfaction. Our results indicated that housework and childcare were shouldered by women rather than men during both periods, i.e., before and during the pandemic. In addition, housework and childcare were viewed by many women as either their sole or shared responsibilities with their partners. Contrarily, many men believed that housework and childcare should be shared or fully borne by their spouses. The gender differences in managing domestic responsibilities persist before and during the pandemic. Furthermore, the findings conclude that there is a significant association between gender and unpaid domestic work responsibilities for certain ethnic groups and not all ethnic groups within both periods. Our findings also revealed that during the pandemic, most women reported time pressure and dissatisfaction towards the division of housework and childcare among couples. Overall, reducing women's burden of unpaid domestic work and improving their well-being is crucial.

Keywords: Dissatisfaction, pandemic, time pressure, unpaid domestic work responsibilities

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected private and public lives globally. In March 2020, most countries responded to COVID-19 with similar preventative measures, including nationwide lockdowns, social distancing measures and closure of schools and workplaces

(World Health Organization, 2020). The Malaysian government swiftly responded to the pandemic by announcing the first nationwide lockdown, which is referred to as Movement Control Order 1.0 (MCO 1.0), as its preventative measure when 533 cases were recorded (Tang, 2020). Furthermore, the second Movement Control Order (MCO 2.0) was implemented due to a massive spike in cases, i.e. 3027 cases, on January 13, 2021 (Povera & Harun, 2021).

Because of the necessary stay-at-home requirement, paid and unpaid domestic work must be carried out concurrently (Boo, 2021b; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). Surveys showed that some employed men and women spent shorter hours in paid work when working from home (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020b; JobStreet Malaysia, 2020). According to these surveys, working men and women spend more time on unpaid domestic work and less on paid-related matters. These surveys highlight that unpaid domestic work cannot be avoided when they are working from home. Unpaid domestic work is important because it ensures the functions of a family (Adrian Hodges Advisory Ltd [AHA Ltd] & Chan, 2019). Someone must take up the responsibility to maintain the family to continue functioning well (Treas & Tatlock, 2012).

In this time of crisis, studies in Malaysia (Boo, 2021b) and worldwide revealed that women shouldered most of the additional housework and childcare responsibilities during the first nationwide lockdown

(Chauhan, 2020; Chung et al., 2021; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Hazarika & Das, 2021; Xue & McMunn, 2021). Most studies only focus on the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities during the first nationwide lockdown (Boo, 2021b; Chauhan, 2020; Chung et al., 2021; Hazarika & Das, 2021; Xue & McMunn, 2021). Limited studies focus on the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Craig & Churchill, 2020). While there is extensive research on the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, quantitative analyses on the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities across various ethnic groups have not been examined. As a result, there is a lack of information about to what extent gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities are statistically significant across various ethnic groups.

Next, notwithstanding the additional burdens, studies in Western countries also reported that the gendered impact put women in more stressful conditions than men (Craig & Churchill, 2020; Neetha, 2021; Xue & McMunn, 2021). These studies imply that women are experiencing more gender inequality in unpaid domestic work and feel more stressed than men during the pandemic in Western countries. Unlike Western research, quantitative empirical research on the subjective feelings of time pressure, spare time and satisfaction with housework and childcare are not explored

in the studies in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Boo, 2021b).

Studies on gender inequality in housework and childcare responsibilities are crucial because past studies prior to the pandemic found that women experienced negative well-being and psychological symptoms due to the unequal division of household labour (Aziz et al., 2016, 2018). Moreover, studies found that unequal division of household labour may further lead to marital divorce (Ruppanner et al., 2017). It is important to highlight that Malaysia's divorce and domestic violence cases have increased tremendously during the pandemic (Carvalho et al., 2021; Rahim et al., 2021). For instance, about 78000 couples filed for divorce during the pandemic compared to only about 56624 divorce cases prior to the pandemic (Carvalho et al., 2021). Likewise, over 9000 domestic violence cases have been recorded since the pandemic, compared to only about 5657 cases recorded prior to the pandemic (Rahim et al., 2021). These cases are worrying because they imply that couples have conflicts with paid and unpaid domestic work when they mostly stay home.

The Malaysian government has introduced two nationwide lockdowns since the pandemic's start in March 2020. However, the effects of the second nationwide lockdown on gender-related differences in housework and childcare responsibilities and subjective feelings are unknown. Likewise, the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities across various ethnic groups are unknown.

Hence, in this study, we aim to address the research gap by determining who is responsible for the housework and childcare responsibilities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and whether there were any gender differences in the housework and childcare responsibilities when heterosexual couples stayed home together during both periods, i.e., before and during the pandemic. Moreover, we aim to analyse further the gender differences in the housework and childcare responsibilities across various ethnic groups within both periods. Lastly, we aim to determine whether there are any gender differences in the subjective feelings of time pressure, spare time and satisfaction with housework and childcare. This study presents preliminary findings on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected unpaid domestic responsibility and subjective feelings about it. These preliminary findings add to the literature on unpaid domestic work among married couples in the Malaysian context during the crisis.

The definition of unpaid domestic work, gender norms and family responsibilities are provided as context for this study.

Defining Unpaid Domestic Work

In this study, housework and childcare are unpaid domestic work (Treas & Tatlock, 2012). For example, housework comprises "food preparation, cooking meals, cleaning, washing clothes, gardening, household repair, shopping and paying utility bills" (Addati et al., 2018, p. 41). On the other hand, childcare comprises "physical care,

emotional care, intellectual care and passive care” (Craig et al., 2008, p. 9). Between housework and childcare, housework is often considered tedious work, flexible and can be delayed or rescheduled later, whereas childcare cannot easily be delayed or rescheduled later (Hewitt et al., 2011). Furthermore, childcare is believed to be more enjoyable and rewarding than housework because it is more associated with feelings of love and emotion (Addati et al., 2018; Hewitt et al., 2011; Poortman & Van Der Lippe, 2009). Both housework and childcare require time and effort to keep the family running without any monetary compensation to individuals who do it at home (Addati et al., 2018).

Gender Norms and Family Responsibilities

Studies suggest that the unequal division of household labour is related to the gender norms that expect women to shoulder family responsibilities (Boo, 2021a; Stratton, 2020; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] & Promundo, 2018). For example, women are expected to engage in housework and childcare work because they are homemakers, whereas men can skip housework and childcare because they are the breadwinner according to gender norms (Boo, 2021a; UNFPA & Promundo, 2018). It is socially unacceptable in many countries to see men solely responsible for housework and childcare because this behaviour is against gender norms (Kaufman, 2014; UNFPA & Promundo, 2018). Men are more likely to take on a supportive role in housework and childcare due to societal

gender norms and expectations (Boo, 2021a). Hence, it is not surprising to see that past studies demonstrated that women devoted more hours than their spouses in unpaid domestic work around the globe because men tend to play the backup role in families (Addati et al., 2018; Boo, 2021a; Budlender, 2008; Choong et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, it is difficult for women to skip doing housework and childcare even though they are employed because men and women have to follow the prescribed gender roles embedded in the cultural and religious gender norms, which emphasise the male-breadwinner and female-homemaker model (Boo, 2021a). Women have to prioritise family and unpaid work responsibilities to fulfil the expectations ingrained in the gender norms (Abdullah et al., 2008; Noor, 1999). Due to the difficulty in juggling paid work and family responsibilities, most employed women stopped working because of family responsibilities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). These studies suggest that family responsibilities become a barrier for women to achieve gender inequality at home and to continue working. Thus, to what extent who is responsible for taking up the housework and childcare responsibilities is important to this study.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey, ‘Movement Control Order 2.0: Unpaid Domestic Work Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic’, was conducted for two weeks in the mid of January 2021. Respondents were recruited through parenting groups on Facebook

in Malaysia. Researchers emailed the administrators of parenting groups to explain the research information and get approval to post a survey call on the parenting group page. With the approval from the administrators, a survey call was posted on the parenting groups on Facebook, and those who fulfil the criteria can participate in this study.

A consent form informing the nature of this research, researchers' contact details, expected survey time, voluntary withdrawal terms, anonymity and confidentiality were included on the first page of the online survey. All respondents were asked to provide consent before their participation. An ethics approval was obtained (Protocol number: USM/JEPeM/COVID19-05).

This online survey targeted couples with young children using a purposive sampling design. A non-probability sample of present Malaysian married couples responded to this online survey, yielding 177 responses. A total of 177 people who participated in the survey were found to be adequate (Cohen, 1988), which exceeds the required number of 166 for a population survey at a 99% confidence level and 10% confidence interval using Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977). It should be highlighted that the researchers are aware of the small sample size. It should be noted that the sample size is largely subjected to the voluntary willingness of respondents to participate in the research during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it also subjected the assistance of social media administrators to post the survey calls on the social media page. Although the sample

size is small, this preliminary study provides important insights into unpaid domestic responsibilities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

The online survey asked the respondents about their demographic information, including age, ethnicity, educational attainment, employment status and monthly income of each spouse and household compositions, including additional adults, age and the number of children in the households during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the online survey asked respondents who should be responsible for housework and childcare within the two periods. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to report their subjective time pressure, spare time and satisfaction with the division of housework and childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the quantitative data collection, Fisher's exact test was used as the analytical method in this study because of the small sample size. The Fisher's exact test is suitable for determining if there is a significant relationship between categorical variables when the sample size is small compared to the Chi-square tests, which require a larger sample size (Korosteleva, 2018).

First, Fisher's exact tests were conducted to determine whether gender differences were statistically significant in the housework and childcare responsibilities within the two periods. Respondents were asked to answer the following question: Who should be responsible for housework and childcare before and during the COVID-19 pandemic? Four options were

given, including me, my spouse, an equal and others, for housework and childcare responsibilities.

Second, Fisher's exact tests were used to develop the analysis further by measuring the relationship between housework and childcare responsibilities by gender and by ethnicity. This analysis aimed to examine to what extent the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities are statistically significant across ethnic groups.

Third, to determine subjective experience in time pressure, spare time and satisfaction with the division of housework and childcare, Fisher's exact tests were conducted based on the respondent's response to the four questions: (1) How often do you feel rushed or pressed for time? (2) How often do you have too much spare time? (3) How satisfied are you with how you divide your housework with your spouse? (4) How satisfied are you with dividing your childcare with your spouse? A 3-point Likert scale ranging from seldom, sometimes and often was included for questions 1 and 2. In contrast, a 3-point Likert scale ranging from dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,

and satisfied were included for questions 3 and 4.

RESULTS

Respondents' Characteristics

A total of 177 respondents completed the online survey. Table 1 presents an overview of sample characteristics. The sample was skewed towards Malay ethnic groups rather than towards other ethnic groups, similar to Malaysia's ethnic group composition (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a). Moreover, the sample was skewed towards working women and those with bachelor's degrees. In addition, the sample was skewed towards nuclear families with children below 12. These characteristics are similar to the online survey conducted during the first nationwide lockdown (Boo, 2021b). It highlights that the proportion of employment status changed from full-time to part-time jobs, and unemployment increased during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic, especially for men. Likewise, the average monthly earnings for both men and women decreased during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic.

Table 1
Respondents' characteristics (means and proportions)

Variable	Women	Men
Ethnicity		
<i>Malay</i>	61.4	67.6
<i>Chinese</i>	26.4	16.2
<i>Indian</i>	8.6	8.1
<i>Others</i>	3.6	8.1

Table 1 (Continue)

Variable	Women	Men
Household composition ^a		
<i>Living with parents/parents-in-law</i>	17.1	0.0
<i>Living with maid</i>	3.6	0.0
<i>Living with children ages below 12</i>	82.1	83.8
<i>Living with children ages over 13</i>	45.7	35.1
Average number of children in the household	2.8	2.6
Average age of respondent	40.5	41.7
Average monthly earnings before COVID-19	4198.5	4920.3
Average monthly earnings during COVID-19	3918.1	4468.1
Employment status before COVID-19		
<i>Full-time</i>	72.1	97.3
<i>Part-time</i>	5.8	2.7
<i>Unemployed</i>	22.1	0.0
Employment status during COVID-19		
<i>Full-time</i>	71.4	81.1
<i>Part-time</i>	5.0	10.8
<i>Unemployed</i>	23.6	8.1
Educational attainments		
<i>Masters' degree or PhD</i>	25.0	18.9
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	35.7	40.5
<i>Graduate certificate or diploma</i>	23.6	16.2
<i>Pre-university or below</i>	15.7	24.3

Note. ^aPercentages do not add up to 100

Housework and Childcare Responsibilities by Gender

Fisher's exact tests were conducted to determine whether gender differences were statistically significant in the housework and childcare responsibilities within the two periods. The results of Fisher's exact tests are presented in Table 2. The results are also presented graphically, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 for housework responsibility within two periods.

Fisher's exact tests demonstrate significant differences between men and women regarding housework responsibilities during both periods. About 46.4% of women perceived housework as their sole responsibility before COVID-19 compared to 55.7% of women during COVID-19. It suggests that the proportion of women reporting housework as a sole responsibility rose during the pandemic. There were,

however, slight decreases in the percentage of women who perceived housework as a shared responsibility between spouses, i.e., from 45% before COVID-19 to 35.7% during COVID-19. This finding suggests that more women perceived housework as their responsibility when working from home during the pandemic.

Contrarily, about 8.1% of men have perceived housework as their sole responsibility before COVID-19, compared to only 5.4% during the pandemic. It suggests that fewer men perceived housework as their sole responsibility

during the pandemic than before it. It could be that during the restrictions, both spouses were at home together; men could have relied on their wives to do housework and played a backup role. Next, about 70.3% of men perceived housework as a shared responsibility between spouses before COVID-19 compared with only 64.9% during COVID-19. These findings suggest that men relied on their wives to do housework during COVID-19 as the percentage of spouses' responsibility rose from 21.6% before the pandemic to 27%.

Table 2
Housework and childcare responsibilities within two periods (%)

	Pre-COVID		During COVID	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Housework responsibility				
<i>Me</i>	46.4	8.1	55.7	5.4
<i>My spouse</i>	3.6	21.6	5.0	27.0
<i>Equal</i>	45.0	70.3	35.7	64.9
<i>Others</i>	5.0	0.0	3.6	2.7
<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		***		***
Childcare responsibility				
<i>Me</i>	48.6	2.7	50.7	5.4
<i>My spouse</i>	3.6	40.5	5.0	32.4
<i>Equal</i>	35.0	54.1	37.1	56.8
<i>Others</i>	12.9	2.7	7.1	5.4
<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		***		***

Note. *** $p < 0.001$



Figure 1. Housework responsibilities before COVID-19 pandemic (%)

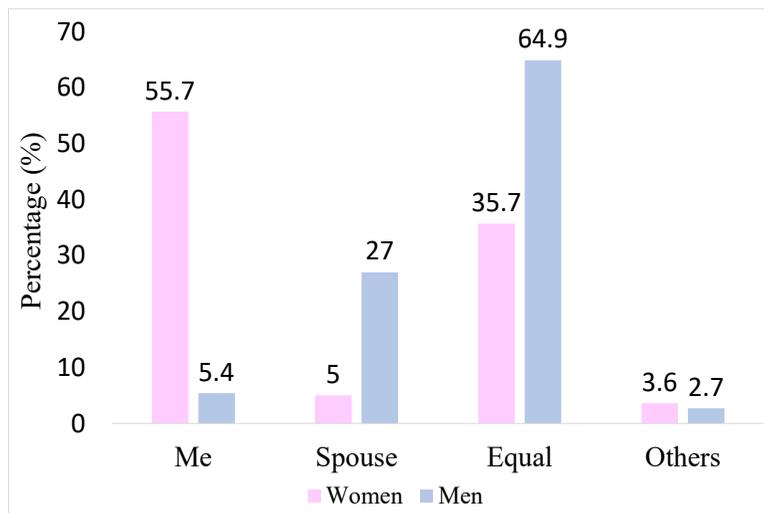


Figure 2. Housework responsibilities during COVID-19 pandemic (%)

Next, Figures 3 and 4 present the gender differences in childcare responsibilities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 3 presents childcare responsibilities before the COVID-19 pandemic, and Figure 4 presents childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fisher’s exact tests demonstrate significant differences between men and

women regarding childcare responsibilities during both periods. About half of the women perceived it as their sole responsibility before and during COVID-19 (48.6% and 50.7%, respectively); likewise, about one-third of women perceived childcare as a shared responsibility with their spouses at both time points. It should be highlighted that the results shown during the pandemic are

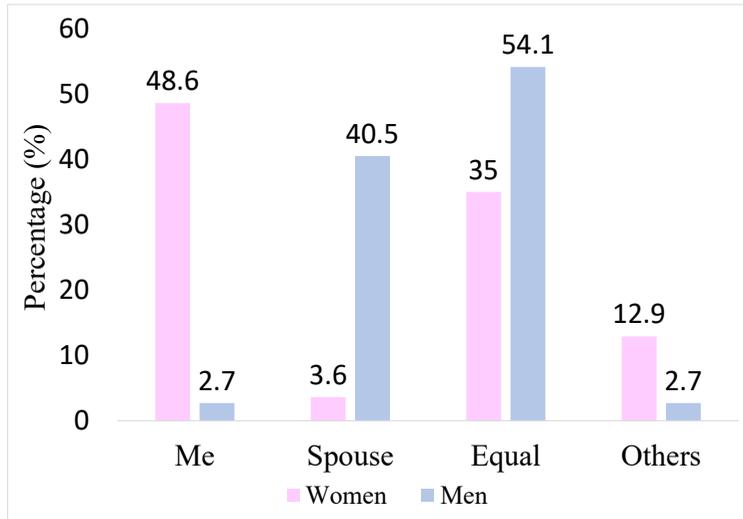


Figure 3. Childcare responsibilities before COVID-19 pandemic (%)

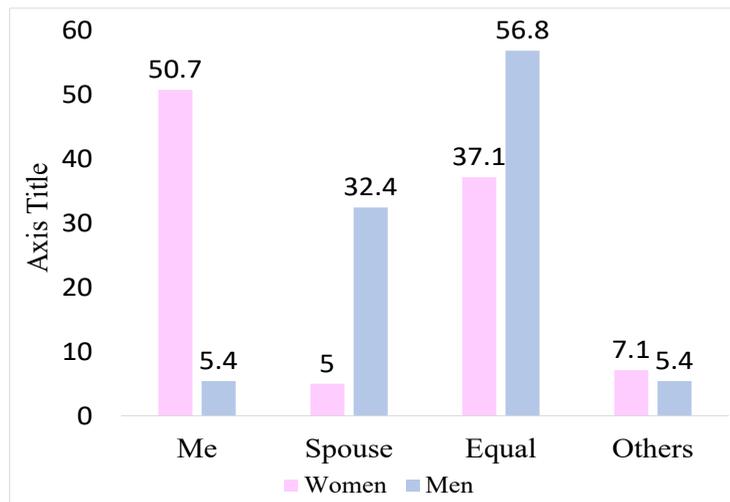


Figure 4. Childcare responsibilities during COVID-19 pandemic (%)

similar to the study conducted during the first nationwide lockdown in Malaysia, which only examined housework and childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the past study did not compare the childcare responsibilities for both periods as conducted by this study (Boo, 2021b).

Conversely, most men perceived childcare as a shared responsibility or their spouses' sole responsibility at both times. These findings suggest that childcare was not the sole responsibility of men either before or during the pandemic. In this study, only a few men perceived childcare as their sole responsibility. However, there

is a slight increment in the percentage of men who tend to perceive childcare as their sole responsibility during the pandemic compared to before it (5.4% and 2.7%, respectively).

To further explore the relationship between housework and childcare responsibilities by gender, ethnicity as the control variable was included to examine to what extent the gender differences in housework and childcare responsibilities are significantly associated with various ethnic groups.

Housework Responsibilities by Gender and by Ethnicity

Table 3 presents the relationship between housework responsibilities by gender and by ethnicity within two periods. Table 3 shows a closer examination of gender differences in housework responsibilities for each ethnic group. The results show that gender differences in housework responsibilities are statistically significant for Malay and Chinese ethnic groups before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and not statistically significant for Indian and other ethnic

Table 3
Housework responsibilities by gender and by ethnicity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (%)

Ethnicity		Pre-COVID		During COVID	
		Women	Men	Women	Men
Malay	<i>Me</i>	43.0	12.0	54.7	8.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	2.3	16.0	4.7	24.0
	<i>Equal</i>	50.0	72.0	36.0	68.0
	<i>Others</i>	4.7	0.0	4.7	0.0
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		***		***
Chinese	<i>Me</i>	45.9	0.0	54.1	0.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	5.4	33.3	8.1	50.0
	<i>Equal</i>	43.2	66.7	35.1	33.3
	<i>Others</i>	5.4	0.0	2.7	16.7
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		*		**
Indian	<i>Me</i>	66.7	0.0	58.3	0.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	0.0	33.3	0.0	33.3
	<i>Equal</i>	25.0	66.7	41.7	66.7
	<i>Others</i>	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		n.s.		n.s.
Others	<i>Me</i>	60.0	0.0	80.0	0.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	20.0	33.3	0.0	0.0
	<i>Equal</i>	20.0	66.7	25.0	75.0
	<i>Others</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		n.s.		n.s.

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

groups. The results suggest that nearly half of the Malay and Chinese women were solely responsible for housework tasks before and during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to Malay and Chinese men. Furthermore, the results suggest that the proportion of Malay and Chinese women reporting housework as a sole responsibility rose during the pandemic.

Looking from the men's perspective, the proportion of Malay and Chinese men who perceived that their spouse is responsible for housework tasks rose during the pandemic, with an increment of 8% during the pandemic for Malay men (16% and 24%), and an increment of 16.7% for Chinese men (33.3% and 50%). It is important to note that no Chinese men perceived housework as their sole responsibility before and during the pandemic. These results indicate that Malay and Chinese women shouldered most of the housework tasks before and during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to men. Moreover, the results indicate that Malay and Chinese men relied on women to complete the housework tasks in both periods, with the proportion of Chinese men doubling that of Malay men.

Childcare Responsibilities by Gender and by Ethnicity

Table 4 demonstrates the relationship between childcare responsibilities by gender and by ethnicity within two periods. Table 4 presents a closer examination of gender differences in childcare responsibilities for each ethnic group. The results show that gender differences in childcare

responsibilities are statistically significant for Malay and Chinese ethnic groups before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and not statistically significant for other ethnic groups. Regarding Indian ethnic groups, the results show that gender differences in childcare responsibilities are statistically significant before the COVID-19 pandemic and not statistically significant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From women's perspective, nearly half of the Malay, Chinese and Indian women perceived that they were responsible for childcare tasks (45.3%, 59.5% and 50%, respectively) compared to men before the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the three ethnic groups, the proportion of Chinese women who perceived childcare as their sole responsibility is higher than the Malay and Indian ethnic groups. On the other hand, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 51.1% of Malay women perceived childcare as their sole responsibility, which suggests that the proportion of Malay women who perceived childcare as sole responsibility increased slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the proportion of Chinese women (54.1%) who perceived childcare as their sole responsibility decreased slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the men's perspective, half of the Chinese men perceived that their spouse was responsible for childcare tasks. The proportion of Chinese men who perceived it as a spouse's responsibility is higher than the Malay men for both periods. It should be highlighted that the proportion of Indian men (66.7%) who perceived childcare as

Table 4
 Childcare responsibilities by gender and by ethnicity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (%)

Ethnicity		Pre-COVID		During COVID	
		Women	Men	Women	Men
Malay	<i>Me</i>	45.3	4.0	51.1	8.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	4.7	32.0	7.0	28.0
	<i>Equal</i>	39.5	64.0	37.2	60.0
	<i>Others</i>	10.5	0.0	4.7	4.0
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		***		***
Chinese	<i>Me</i>	59.5	0.0	54.1	0.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	2.7	50.0	2.7	50.0
	<i>Equal</i>	18.9	33.3	32.4	33.3
	<i>Others</i>	18.9	16.7	10.8	16.7
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		***		***
Indian	<i>Me</i>	50.0	0.0	41.7	0.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	0.0	66.7	0.0	33.3
	<i>Equal</i>	33.3	33.3	58.3	66.7
	<i>Others</i>	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		*		n.s.
Others	<i>Me</i>	20.0	0.0	40.0	0.0
	<i>My spouse</i>	0.0	66.7	0.0	33.3
	<i>Equal</i>	80.0	33.3	20.0	66.7
	<i>Others</i>	0.0	0.0	40.0	0.0
	<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		n.s.		n.s.

Note. *** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$

their spouse's responsibility was much higher than the Malay (32%) and Chinese (50%) men before the pandemic. The proportion of Indian men perceived so is almost double that of Malay men. These results imply that Malay, Chinese and Indian men perceived that their spouse should be responsible for childcare might lead to gender inequality continuing to prevail in the households.

Subjective Time Pressure, Spare Time and Satisfaction

Table 5 presents gender differences in terms of the subjective experience with time pressure, spare time and satisfaction with the division of housework and childcare during COVID-19. First, the results indicate gender differences in time pressure. About 42.1% of women 'often' felt rushed during the pandemic compared with only 21.6%

Table 5
 Subjective time pressure, spare time and satisfaction (%)

	Women	Men
I feel rushed or pressed for time		
<i>Seldom</i>	18.6	35.1
<i>Sometimes</i>	39.3	43.2
<i>Often</i>	42.1	21.6
<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		**
I have too much spare time		
<i>Seldom</i>	66.4	51.4
<i>Sometimes</i>	26.4	35.1
<i>Often</i>	7.1	13.5
<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		n.s.
Regarding how I divide housework tasks with my spouse, I am		
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	22.1	10.8
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	42.9	32.4
<i>Satisfied</i>	35.0	56.8
<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		**
Regarding how I divide childcare tasks with my spouse, I am		
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	23.6	8.1
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	43.6	35.1
<i>Satisfied</i>	32.9	56.8
<i>Fisher's exact test</i>		**

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

of men. Second, no significant gender differences were observed regarding spare time during COVID-19. Third, about 22% of women felt dissatisfied with housework and childcare division during COVID-19 compared with less than 10% of men. Conversely, 56.8% of men felt satisfied with the housework and childcare division during the pandemic. These findings suggest that about half of the men are more satisfied than

women with the division of housework and childcare during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

Women shoulder most housework and childcare responsibilities before and during the pandemic. The subjective experiences in time pressure and satisfaction with the division of housework and childcare reflect the additional burdens on families, which

were shouldered mostly by women during the restrictions. The restrictions have implications for both women and men, with more women often feeling rushed and dissatisfied with the household division than men.

The results indicate that most women perceived housework and childcare as their responsibility or a shared responsibility before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrarily, most men tend to perceive housework and childcare as a shared responsibility or their spouses' sole responsibility during both periods (Table 2). These results suggest that women are mainly responsible for unpaid domestic work before and during the pandemic. It is consistent with the research conducted in Western countries (Craig & Churchill, 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020).

In addition, the results found that many men refused to take over the sole responsibility of unpaid domestic work before and during the restrictions. It is consistent with the research conducted during the first nationwide lockdown in Malaysia that most men tend to share the responsibilities or assist their wives in unpaid domestic work even though they have spent more time at home (Boo, 2021b). It implies that work-from-home arrangements resulted in couples spending time at home and did not free women from many family responsibilities. Likely, men do not perceive family responsibilities as men's work but women's work even though they have more time at home. The continued gender inequality in family responsibilities

is likely related to the expected gender roles embedded in the gender norms (Boo, 2021a; Kaufman, 2014; UNFPA & Promundo, 2018).

A closer examination of gender differences in housework responsibilities for each ethnic group found that Malay and Chinese women tend to perceive housework and childcare as their sole responsibility within both periods. In contrast, Malay and Chinese men tend to perceive housework and childcare as their spouse's responsibilities. It implies that Malay and Chinese women continue to shoulder housework and childcare responsibilities because they perceive that women are responsible for unpaid domestic work. Likewise, Malay and Chinese men continue to perceive that they can rely on their spouses to complete housework and childcare work, which has loaded the burden on women's shoulders. The way Malay and Chinese women and men perceive housework and childcare responsibilities are consistent with the gender role expectation in society (Boo, 2021a; Kaufman, 2014; UNFPA & Promundo, 2018).

As a result, the pandemic has generated more housework and childcare workloads for women than men. It can be seen in the greater time pressure and dissatisfaction with unpaid domestic work among women (Table 5). It suggests that women are experiencing more difficult times than men during the pandemic. The results support that more than half of the men felt satisfied with the housework and childcare division during the pandemic. This study implies

that the crisis has negatively impacted more women than men, which suggests that the gendered division of housework and childcare occurred not only before the pandemic but also during the pandemic.

In addition, this study reveals the challenge of encouraging men to take over or share unpaid domestic work responsibilities during the pandemic, as they felt satisfied with the current division of household responsibilities. Tackling this issue would require changes in men's perceptions of unpaid domestic work as only a woman's responsibility. For example, shifting the traditional gender norms seems important to encourage more men to take up unpaid domestic responsibilities and not heavily rely on their spouses. Also, it would require men to seriously acknowledge the negative well-being arising from the unequal division of household labour and care about their wives' well-being by contributing more to unpaid domestic work. Without taking this issue seriously, women are more likely to suffer from the prevailing gender inequality at home.

Apart from changes in men's perceptions towards unpaid domestic work as women's work, changes in women's perceptions towards unpaid domestic work being their sole responsibility is crucial because women tend to shoulder a disproportional amount of housework and childcare. However, their spouses are at home during the pandemic. Women should encourage or negotiate with their spouses to engage more in unpaid domestic work and not be solely responsible. This change is vital as it would

reduce women's burden and time pressure during the crisis. Moreover, changes in women's perception towards housework and childcare responsibilities are important because many women quit their jobs due to family responsibilities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). It is important to note that unpaid domestic work negatively impacts women's time and satisfaction, as highlighted in this study, and the labour force participation rate, as recorded in the Department of Statistics Malaysia. In addition, studies found that women's dissatisfaction towards the division of housework and childcare among couples is more likely to lead to marital divorce (Ruppanner et al., 2017). It should be highlighted that Malaysia's divorce rate is increasing tremendously during this pandemic (Carvalho et al., 2021); hence, this issue should not be taken lightly.

This study has methodological limitations, including an online survey as the recruiting method and small sample size. First, an online survey was used during the COVID-19 pandemic because of mandatory work-from-home arrangements and the closure of schools and daycare centres; it is the most suitable method to adopt during MCO 2.0. However, this online survey excluded people who fulfilled the sample criteria but could not access the Internet. Second, only a small sample size was achieved. Hence, the findings could not be generalised to the broad population but could be generalised to a small number of online populations only. Although this study has methodological limitations, it

provides early results on the gender and ethnic differences in family responsibilities within the two periods. In addition, this study provides preliminary results on the subjective experiences of time pressure and satisfaction with the division of housework and childcare in the Malaysian context.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings imply that the gendered division of household labour has become worrying as most Malay and Chinese women still shoulder unpaid domestic work before and during the pandemic, despite men being at home. This phenomenon is worrying because gender inequality in the household undermines women's ability to take part in paid work and have more leisure time. Also, this phenomenon seems to be against the promotion of shared responsibility within the household by Sustainable Development Goal 5.

The findings also found that more women reported time pressure and dissatisfaction than men during the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings add insights to the body of knowledge on unpaid domestic responsibilities before and during the crisis across various ethnic groups. It also adds to the literature on the subjective experiences of time pressure and satisfaction with the division of housework and childcare in Malaysia. This study calls for the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development's attention on reducing women's burden in unpaid domestic work and improving their well-being during the pandemic.

Recommendations for future research include a larger sample size to study gender and ethnic differences in unpaid domestic work, subjective experiences in time pressure and satisfaction among couples during the post-pandemic. Also, researching the division of household labour during the post-pandemic with no mandatory work-from-home order would add insight into gender and family studies in the Malaysian context.

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