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## Home kitchen still mainly female territory

Maybe this gender equality thing goes only so far.

When it comes to meal planning, shopping and food preparation in two-parent families, women still shoulder the vast bulk of the domestic responsibility despite decades of increasing involvement in the work force, according to a study published in the September issue of *The Journal of The American Dietetic Association*.

Married women's participation in the work force more than tripled to over 51 percent between 1940 and 1982 and 70 percent of women with children worked outside the home in 1996. So the researchers from University of Minnesota School of Public Health wanted to know: Are men reciprocating by playing a greater part in the traditionally female tasks of planning, buying and preparing family meals?

The short answer: not really.

From data drawn from a survey of more than 1,200 American men, living in households headed by both a man and woman, the researchers found:

- 23 percent of men were involved in meal planning, compared with 93 percent of women;
- 36 percent of men took part in grocery shopping, while 88 percent of women did so;
- 27 percent of men participated in meal preparation, compared with 90 percent of women.

The researchers analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 1994 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes of Individuals, a nationally representative survey containing information on food consumption and nutrient intake.

While previous research studies have looked at the division of labor in husband-wife households, few if any have examined men's involvement in meal-related domestic tasks, according to the University of Minnesota researchers.

The researchers found that men who are more likely than average to help with meals are relatively young, come from lower-income and smaller families and live in households where the woman works full-time.

Men living in households making less than 1.3 times the poverty rate were nearly three times more likely to take part in meal planning than men with an income level at least 3.5 times the poverty level rate. A possible explanation, according to the researchers: "In lower-income households where less money is available for time-saving meal options, such as eating out or purchasing convenience foods, men may be more likely to assist their partner in family meals."

Men from households containing just two people were nearly five times more likely to be involved in meal activities than men from families with four or more members. That may be because "as children enter the household, division of labor between (the man and woman) increases in response to the household workload. More specifically, in households with children, male and female heads of households may be more likely to divide labor based on traditional gender roles," the researchers write.

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Men over 56 were least likely to be involved in meal planning. This suggests that older men "may tend to hold more traditional attitudes toward gender roles in tasks related to family meals," and such men "tend to be less involved in domestic tasks," according to researchers.

Men whose female partners work full-time were twice as likely to take part in meal planning as those whose partners did not work. The researchers say this finding supports other studies showing that men do more housework when their wives are employed outside the home.

Nothing that "education efforts to improve family nutrition have tended to target the female rather than the male head of household," the researchers write that their findings appear to "provide little impetus for reshaping current nutrition intervention strategies" aimed at women.

The Journal of The American Dietetic Association, published monthly, is the ADA's official research publication and the premier peer-reviewed journal in the field of dietetics and nutrition. The Chicago-based ADA is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals.

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