

The Gendered Division of Labour in Parenthood: Impacts on Women's Mental Health

by

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Abstract

This capstone takes an in-depth look at the socio-cultural, structural, and psychological factors contributing to the unequal division of domestic labour among dual-earner heterosexual couples throughout parenthood, and the associated negative mental health implications for women. A review of the current literature demonstrated that despite dual-earner couples becoming the norm in recent decades, significant gender discrepancies in the division of labour among heterosexual couples remains. Although men are more engaged in domestic life than ever before, women continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid work demands. Research has found that this gendered and unequal division of household and childcare responsibilities has detrimental effects on women's mental health. Exploring the topic from a feminist framework, recommendations include enhancing visibility of gender discrepancies, promoting egalitarian ideals, reinforcing the value of women's work, prioritizing self-care for mothers, and advocating for men taking parental leave.

Keywords: Division of domestic labour, unpaid work, unpaid labour, invisible labour, gender discrepancies, women's mental health.

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The Gendered Division of Labour in Parenthood: Impacts on Women's Mental Health

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Research has shown that despite more women joining the workforce in recent decades, shifts in the division of domestic labour has not kept pace. Within heterosexual couples, women remain responsible for the majority of domestic duties despite dual-earner households becoming the norm (Guppy et al., 2019; Horne et al., 2018; Jung & O'Brien, 2019; Polachek & Wallace, 2015; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). This unequal participation in unpaid work can have detrimental effects on “mental health, relational well-being, workplace achievement, and the economic self-sufficiency of women” (Jung & O'Brien, 2019, p. 184).

Looking at the gendered division of labour in parenting specifically, the transition to parenthood has profound effects on how couples divide housework. It represents an important shifting point within the relationship, cementing gender performances and laying the foundation for the division of domestic labour in the future (Yavorsky et al., 2015).

The Division of Domestic Labour

Globally, women are still considered primarily responsible for domestic labour, spending on average, between 3 to 6 hours a day on unpaid work, and men contributing 0.5 to 2 hours (Ervin et al., 2022). In developed countries, women average 4 hours on unpaid work each day, and men 2.5 hours (Jung & O'Brien, 2017). A study by Statistics Canada found that in 2019, Canadian women engaged in 820 hours of unpaid work, 50 percent more than the 540 hours that men contributed. This study also found that partnered women with children under 15 spent twice as many hours on unpaid work than men, with women averaging 15 hours per week in comparison with 10 hours for men (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Looking at childcare specifically, women shoulder the bulk of childcare responsibilities with mothers doing roughly twice as much childcare as fathers (Piovani & Aydiner-Avsar, 2021; Schieman et al., 2017; Yavorsky et al., 2015). In Canada, on average, mothers spend 7.5 hours per day on childcare, while fathers spend 4.9 hours (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Although social change has resulted in the division of domestic labour becoming more equitable, with men participating more in housework and childcare than previous generations, women continue to take on the majority of domestic labour, even when they engage in full-time paid work (Charbonneau et al., 2019; Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Horne et al., 2018; Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Polachek & Wallace, 2015). In developed countries, in comparison with men, women spend more combined time on paid and unpaid work (Ervin et al., 2022; Piovani & Aydiner-Avsar, 2021). Often referred to as the “second shift,” this double burden has important implications for women’s mental health.

Mental Health Implications

Research has found that the gendered and unequal division of housework and childcare is linked with women’s poorer mental health, depression, psychological distress, and postpartum depression (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Jung & O’Brien, 2017; Seedat & Rondon, 2021). Women’s longer hours spent on unpaid work have been associated with higher depression symptom trajectories, greater mental health burdens, and negative effects on quality of life (Seedat & Rondon, 2021).

A systematic review exploring the relationship between gender, unpaid work and mental health among employed adults found that ongoing inequalities in the division of domestic labour puts women at greater risk of negative mental health outcomes, in comparison with men. The review found that unpaid labour negatively impacts mental health for working women but found

no link for employed men (Ervin et al., 2022). A study by Piovani and Aydiner-Avsar (2021) exploring the association between mental health and combined unpaid and paid work time, found that total work time is associated with increased emotional distress for women with unpaid work being the primary contributor of emotional distress. No significant association was found for men. This study noted that for women, an increase of 10 hours of unpaid work resulted in a 22 percent increased risk of experiencing emotional distress.

These findings can further be demonstrated when considering the impacts of COVID-19 on the gendered division of labour and women's mental health. Throughout the pandemic, there was a significant increase in unpaid work demands due to a lack of childcare and support, which magnified and further exacerbated domestic labour inequities, placing "women at an even greater risk of depression, anxiety, and other common mental disorders" (Seedat & Rondon, 2021, p. 2). Studies exploring the division of labour among heterosexual couples during the pandemic found that women were responsible for the majority of unpaid work and that those who engaged in long hours of domestic labour reported higher levels of psychological distress (Janzen & Hellsten, 2021; Xue & McMunn, 2021). Furthermore, mothers with young children were specifically vulnerable with anxiety and depression more than doubling pre-pandemic rates (Janzen & Hellsten, 2021).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this capstone is to take an in-depth look at the socio-cultural, structural and psychological factors driving the unequal division of domestic labour among dual-earner heterosexual couples throughout parenthood. This research will provide a better understanding of how best to support women experiencing the negative mental health outcomes associated with this gender discrepancy. This capstone aims to review relevant research on the gendered division

of domestic labour, factors contributing to these inequities, and the associated negative mental health outcomes for women. It will also make recommendations for mental health practitioners working with this population. It is intended for counsellors working with women, parents, couples, and families, as well as researchers, health care providers, and policymakers.

The research questions guiding this capstone include:

1. How does the transition to parenthood impact the division of domestic labour among dual-earner heterosexual couples?
2. What are the key socio-cultural, structural, and psychological factors contributing to and maintaining the unequal division of labour?
3. What specific outcomes of gendered domestic labour discrepancies foster negative mental health implications for women?
4. What treatment options and best practices would best support working with this population?

Theoretical Framework

Feminism

When exploring the gendered division of domestic labour in parenthood, feminism is an important framework to consider.

Broadly understood, feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks an end to gender-based oppression. Motivated by the quest for social justice, feminist inquiry provides a wide range of perspectives on cultural, economic, social, and political phenomena. It identifies and evaluates the many ways that some norms have been used to exclude, marginalize, and oppress people on the basis of

gender, as well as how gendered identities have been shaped to conform and uphold the norms of a patriarchal society (McAfee et al., 2023, para. 3).

Analyzing research relating to gender discrepancies and women's mental health from a feminist perspective is crucial due to long-entrenched social norms, gender expectations and power imbalances that contribute to and maintain these inequalities. As Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) highlight, feminist research has evolved conversations about the gendered division of domestic labour from simply analyzing the amount of time each partner spends on housework and childcare, to acknowledging the powerful and hidden influences of gender, and making them more visible.

Contribution to the Field

A primary goal of this capstone is to execute an in-depth analysis of the specific contributors to adverse mental health outcomes for women in relation to the gendered division of domestic labour to better inform treatment options. Having a deeper understanding of the role that structural influences, gender ideologies, and socio-cultural contexts play in mental health, will provide insights on how best to approach working with this population. This capstone will put forward recommendations for mental health professionals working with women, parents, couples, and families impacted by these issues.

An additional goal of this capstone is to build awareness of the structural changes that need to be advocated for in order to best support women impacted by ongoing gender discrepancies. This capstone will put a spotlight on structural frameworks and workplace policies that need to be addressed to better support women and shift normative gender expectations in relation to the division of labour.

Reflectivity and Positionality Statement

I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual, married, middle-class, working mother. As a mother to two young children in a long-term dual-earner relationship, I have experienced the challenges of navigating the division of domestic labour in the context of a patriarchal society.

During COVID, as unpaid work responsibilities increased immensely given a lack of childcare and external supports, I observed my own mental health and that of many close friends and family members, particularly women and mothers, greatly deteriorate as they took on the bulk of additional demands.

The choice to focus on dual-earner heterosexual couples specifically is due to my own interest in exploring how social constructs of traditional gender roles influence our perspectives and behaviour. Having the opportunity to research this topic has provided me with a higher level of awareness of the micro and macro influences at play, as well as the powerful role of long-entrenched gender expectations.

Motherhood, relationships, and the experience of one's gender are cultural and deeply personal experiences. In researching and writing this capstone, it is essential that I remain aware of my biases in relation to my own internalized norms of these concepts. Approaching the division of labour in my own relationship from a feminist lens, I have a bias towards making the assumption that women in general want to resist fulfilling traditional gender expectations in relation to the division of housework and childcare. In working on this capstone, I need to acknowledge these biases and remain aware of their influences as to not impact the content or positioning of the research in the literature review, or recommendations I put forward.

Definition of Terms

Childcare

All unpaid responsibilities and tasks relating to the physical and emotional care of children, inside of and outside of the home.

Domestic Labour, Unpaid Labour, and Unpaid Work

Responsibilities relating to maintaining a household and caring for family members and children without paid compensation.

Housework

All unpaid responsibilities and tasks relating to maintaining a household.

Mental Health

The component of an individual's health that includes a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health is a state of well-being that enables an individual to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community (CDC, n.d.).

Paid Work

Work completed for monetary compensation.

Women

Inclusive of all women, including cisgender, transgender, non-binary, and gender fluid individuals who identify as women.

Outline of the Capstone Project Chapters

The remainder of this capstone will include a literature review, as well as a discussion and application of the research. Chapter two will include a literature review summarizing and analyzing research on the gendered division of domestic labour, factors contributing to these inequities, and the associated negative mental health outcomes for women. Chapter three will

include a discussion of this research and will make recommendations for mental health practitioners working with this population.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 1 shared a summary of the current research on the gendered division of domestic labour, as well as its impact on women's mental health. The following chapter will review the relevant literature in three key areas. Part one will explore how the transition to parenthood impacts how heterosexual couples divide domestic labour. Part two will review the social and structural factors contributing to and maintaining these discrepancies. Part three will examine the outcomes of these discrepancies that foster negative mental health implications for women.

The Transition to Parenthood

The transition to parenthood has been deemed one of the most pivotal milestones that a couple will encounter. Welcoming a child into the family has profound effects on relational dynamics and how couples divide domestic labour (Jung & O'Brien, 2019; Yavorsky et al., 2015). During this key life transition, most couples report a decline in relationship satisfaction and an increase in the amount of time allocated to housework and childcare, with women shouldering the majority of additional demands (Yavorsky et al., 2015).

It is important to explore the division of labour throughout the transition to parenthood as gender performances during this time can be cemented for years to come, laying the foundation for the division of housework, childcare, as well as paid work responsibilities throughout the life course of the relationship (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

The literature highlighted that the transition to parenthood can act as a key contributor in producing and intensifying gender inequalities in the division of domestic labour (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). A study by Yavorsky et al. (2015) exploring changes in the division of labour among dual-earner heterosexual couples throughout the transition to

parenthood found that gender inequalities were magnified throughout this period. They found that when looking at paid and unpaid work, men increased total work time by 12.5 hours and women by 21 hours per week following the birth of a baby, a 70% higher increase for women. Prior to welcoming a child, the women in this sample had equally divided workloads with their partners.

Research has shown that egalitarian ideals are increasing among young adults with more importance being placed on an equal division of household tasks than previous generations (Gerson, 2010). A study by Pedulla and Thébaud (2015) found that the bulk of young couples reported a preference for an egalitarian relationship structure when that option was available to them. Young men specifically have ranked equity in parenting as a top priority, and both men and women express expectations of equally shared paid and unpaid labour (Charbonneau et al., 2019; Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Schieman et al., 2018). Despite this, a notable finding in the literature was the notion that first time parents with more egalitarian views who plan to challenge traditional gender norms within their new parental roles, end up falling back into traditional task allocations with women continuing to take on the role of primary caregiver, and men fulfilling the breadwinner role, even in dual-earner couples (Kamp Dush et al., 2018).

Baxter et al. (2015) who explored heterosexual couples' perceptions of equity regarding the division of domestic labour found that after the birth of a first child, women's perspectives of motherhood became more traditional, shifting to prioritize the primary caregiver role. Guppy et al. (2019) also referenced that during the pre-natal period, fathers who plan to approach fatherhood from a more egalitarian stance, end up reverting back to the breadwinner role after experiencing the challenges of navigating parenting and work responsibilities.

A study by Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) found that although most fathers are more involved in childcare than previous generations, even those wanting to live by more egalitarian ideals, revert to a traditional division of labour following the birth of a baby. Another study by Grunow et al. (2012) exploring how the division of labour evolves over the first 14 years of marriage, found that of 1423 newly married couples, 44% reported that domestic labour was shared equally, with roughly 85% reporting that women were taking on the majority of housework 14 years later. Although this study was not specifically exploring parenthood, it does demonstrate a reversion to more traditional gender roles later in life.

This reversion to traditional gender roles could be tied to long-entrenched social and structural norms relating to men viewing a paid income as their priority contribution to their family (Gruson-Wood et al., 2022). As Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) note, the demands of fatherhood are evolving. “Fathers are being called on to take a more active part in childcare, but previous models of gender and hidden male power limit and constrain their awareness and willingness to share parenting duties” (p. 34).

Social and Structural Factors Contributing to an Unequal Divide

Hammarström and Phillips (2012) who analyzed the impact of gender relations in depressive symptoms, found that within a couple’s relationship dynamic, gender inequity was associated with depressive mood in women. They highlighted that although there is a large amount of research on the causes of gender differences in depression, the focus is primarily on intrinsic factors which emphasize the importance of biological contributors. They note the significant role that socio-cultural factors play and the strong need for more research on the social and gendered determinants.

The following section will explore the literature's most prominently featured social and structural factors contributing to and sustaining the unequal division of domestic labour during the transition to parenthood including gender, institutional frameworks and workplace policies, and power dynamics.

The Role of Gender

Throughout the literature, gender role expectations, gender norms, and gender stereotypes are repeatedly identified as a root cause of the inequitable division of domestic labour among dual-earner heterosexual couples (Jung & O'Brien, 2019; Scheiman et al., 2018). When referencing parenthood in the context of heterosexual marriages, Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) note:

These couple processes are embedded within a larger social system in which gender is viewed as the legitimate source for the allocation of rights, power, privilege, and responsibility. More than any other cultural belief, the idealized notion of separate spheres for mothers and fathers has defined what it means to be a man or a woman in our society (p. 20).

Doing Gender

A recurring reference throughout the literature was the notion that ongoing discrepancies in the division of labour are an outcome of women and men "doing gender". Doing gender means continually reinforcing the primary differences between men and women through repeated behaviours and actions (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Women may strengthen their feminine identity through domestic duties and childcare, whereas men embrace masculinity by seeking a breadwinner role (Yavorsky et al., 2015).

Kamp Dush et al. (2018) noted that an individual does not need to embrace traditional gender beliefs to conform to genderized behaviours. Family, friends and structural frameworks will hold them accountable to gender norms no matter their beliefs. As Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) note, men and women are restricted by the gendered institutions of the world, “the workplace, family, school, and politics where the dominant definitions of gender are reinforced and reproduced and where we become gendered selves in a gendered society, and alternative ways are discouraged” (p. 23).

Parents who want to challenge stereotypic gender norms might feel judged if they do not comply with traditional gender roles which can impact how they parent in practice (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). This is evident in the concept of ‘the good mother,’ with the dominant perspective holding that women should, above all else, prioritize the primary caregiver role and the day-to-day management of children’s lives, regardless of their or their partner’s paid employment status (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). As Goodwin and Huppertz (2010) highlighted, images of the good mother are embedded in the media, public policy, and workplace culture, and permeate daily interactions and practices. Yavorsky et al. (2015) emphasized that for women who engage in paid work, there is immense pressure to maintain high levels of commitment to employers while also fulfilling the traditional role of primary caregiver.

The literature also highlighted the impact that gender norms play on how men parent and the roles they prioritize. Although there has been an increased focus on the notion of the ‘involved father’ in recent decades with men now being expected to be more competent and engaged parents, social norms dictate that men are still expected to primarily contribute to the family through paid income (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Polachek & Wallace, 2015; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) emphasize that traditional gender

constructs perpetuate male dominance, reinforce an inequitable allocation of domestic duties among partners, and position men outside of the mother and child bond which can result in fathers being less attuned and connected with children. For many men, while there is a balance required in terms of providing for the family financially versus through childcare and engagement, generally it is considered culturally appropriate that they fit childcare in around paid work (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020).

This point emphasizes the socio-cultural discrepancy relating to gender norms in what it takes to be deemed a ‘good father’ versus a ‘good mother’ and the pressure placed on working mothers to congruently manage paid work while also prioritizing the primary caregiver role, above all else. A recent attitudinal study on maternity leave found that women who took parental leave were considered to be less capable at work and those who did not were seen as less competent parents and spouses (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017).

Gendered Tasks

Another way in which heterosexual couples reinforce and comply with gender norms is through gendered household tasks. Jung and O’Brien (2017) reference two categories of household tasks that reinforce gender stereotypes. Routine tasks are broadly viewed as female tasks and defined by their repetitive, time consuming, and non-optional nature such as laundry, cleaning, cooking and grocery shopping. Intermittent tasks, which are viewed as stereotypical male tasks are less frequent and time consuming, and more flexible such as home repairs, yard work, and car maintenance.

The division of parenting responsibilities has also been found to be gendered, with women performing more demanding and laborious tasks such as disciplining, changing diapers, and experiencing more parental ‘on-call’ duties, whereas men tend to participate in more fun

aspects of childcare such as playing with children (Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Kamp Dush et al., 2018). The literature also noted that women often engage in more solo parenting, whereas men tend to provide childcare with mothers present (Jung & O'Brien, 2017). Generally, research has shown that gender is the dominant factor in dividing childcare responsibilities, with women being tasked with the majority of parenting obligations even when working full-time (Scheiman et al., 2018).

Quantity and Quality of Non-Work Time

Men and women can also “do gender” in terms of how they experience leisure time. Studies have found that there are gender discrepancies in the quantity and quality of free time among heterosexual couples in terms of non-work time such as leisure, eating, grooming, and sleep (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

Kamp Dush et al. (2018) found that overall, men benefit from more leisure time than women and that the largest difference can be found among married parents with small children. Their study examining how heterosexual couples engage in leisure time found that following the birth of a child, men spent more than double the amount of time than women on leisure activities while their partners engaged in some form of domestic labour or childcare. The quality of non-work time was also found to differ in that when women engage in leisure time, they often experience more interruptions, are more likely to have children present, or be simultaneously completing other household and childcare tasks. Furthermore, this study suggested that during the transition to parenthood, with men often benefitting from a disproportionate amount of leisure time, women who tend to take on more childcare and housework responsibilities, have less opportunity to engage in exercise, social interaction, or other self-care activities that have been found to reduce stress and enhance well-being (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019).

Institutional Frameworks and Workplace Policy

Throughout the literature, another prominently featured theme relating to the inequitable division of labour among heterosexual couples was the significant role that institutional frameworks and workplace policies play in reinforcing gender expectations in parenting (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). Jung and O'Brien (2017) note that workplace policies, as well as access to childcare, strongly impact how couples negotiate and divide domestic labour.

Paternity Leave

Focusing on paternity leave specifically, the literature noted a number of significant benefits related to fathers taking paternity leave. These include increased engagement with children, fathers who are more willing and capable of taking on domestic labour and childcare responsibilities, and increased career advancement opportunities for women given that it is more common for mothers to take leave and decrease paid work hours post-birth (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Kinney, 2019; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

Although there is growing interest in the provision of paternity leave, research has shown that in the US less than 50% of fathers employed at organizations who offer paid paternal leave take more than one week off (Cruickshank, 2019; Kinney, 2019; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). Within Canada, although couples can share 35 weeks of parental leave, it is common for the majority of that time to be allocated to mothers. According to Statistics Canada, between 2012 and 2017, 88% of mothers took maternity leave, parental leave or a combination of both, in comparison with 46% of fathers. Furthermore, of the mothers who took leave, 80% took between 27 to 52 weeks, whereas 48% of fathers who took leave, returned to work within 5 weeks or less (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Kinney (2019) who explored factors impacting paternity leave-taking decisions suggests that due to fathers being free from the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth such as recovery and breastfeeding, in many cases taking parental leave is more optional for men than it is for women. This leaves fathers more open to the influences of their social environment, specifically the workplace context, when making the decision of whether or not to take leave.

Although Western countries are slowly embracing paternity leave, traditional gender roles and expectations are strongly embedded in workplace culture (Kinney, 2019). Research on workplace-family policies has identified a number of negative impacts that parental leave can have on the work environment including an increased workload on other employees, perceptions of unfairness, and resentment towards those taking leave. These negative perceptions create stigma that can influence leave-taking decisions (Kinney, 2019).

An interesting finding in the literature was the notion that a primary source of the stigma attached to taking paternity leave relates to non-compliance with traditional male gender roles (Kinney, 2019). Berdalh and Moon (2013) noted that employees are judged based on how well they conform to stereotypic gender roles, with women as the primary caregiver and men as the breadwinner. When fathers exhibit behaviours that prioritize family over work, they are in violation of these stereotypes. A study by Rudman and Mescher (2013) found that although both men and women can be rated more poorly on job skills when seeking more flexibility in their work schedule, such as leave or part time work, the impact for men is greater because they are characterized as being gender defiant, whereas women are viewed as gender normative.

Women's Career Progression

As highlighted, institutional frameworks and workplace policies play a significant role in reinforcing and maintaining traditional gender stereotypes. The literature highlighted that with

men primarily maintaining the breadwinner role, women are often pulled into the primary caregiver role at the cost of paid work opportunities, career progression, and earning potential. A study by Gruson-Wood et al. (2022) found that within heterosexual couples who have children, men's long hours allocated to paid work can be problematic for partners. They noted that the prioritization of allocating time to fathers' paid work can often result in mothers taking on the stereotypical gender role of primary caregiver.

Domestic labour and childcare are a key factor in determining if women engage and stay in paid employment with research showing that even the expectation of having children can negatively impact heterosexual young women's career plans and aspirations due to the assumption that they will take on a larger portion of domestic labour and childcare than their future partners (Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Seedat & Rondon, 2021). In dual-earner couples, the inequitable division of domestic labour following the birth of a baby results in women reducing future paid work hours due to both the real and anticipated demands of motherhood (Yavorsky et al., 2015). This can have financial implications for women, such as in cases of divorce, or illness or injury of a spouse (Yavorsky et al., 2015). Jung and O'Brien (2017) note that unpaid labour offers one of the most compelling explanations for the gender pay gap, especially when considering young and middle-aged married women. As highlighted in the following section, the gendered discrepancy in career advancement opportunities and earning potential during the transition to parenthood can also have a big impact on power dynamics within the relationship and how couples negotiate and divide domestic labour.

Power Dynamics and Spousal Bargaining

Exploring the role that power relations play in how dual-earner couples divide domestic labour, the literature highlighted a number of perspectives that hypothesize how couples

negotiate and distribute household tasks. The relative resources perspective posits that partners who have access to more resources than their spouse, such as income or education, have more bargaining power to negotiate out of housework and childcare (Jung & O'Brien, 2017). The time availability perspective emphasizes that in dual-earner couples, the partner with the most available time outside of paid work hours will take on the majority of unpaid work (Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Yavorksy et al., 2015). While access to resources and time availability are influential in determining how couples negotiate and divide tasks, these factors fail to explain why women continue to shoulder the majority of household responsibilities even when they earn a higher income or have less time available outside of paid work hours than their spouses (Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Returning to the concept of "doing gender," a suggested explanation for this is based in the gender ideology perspective, which suggests that traditional gender role socialization dictates how heterosexual couples divide household responsibilities (Jung & O'Brien, 2017).

Another recurring reference in the literature relating to spousal bargaining was the concept of specialization. Specialization refers to couples falling into traditional roles with one partner, commonly the man, focusing on paid work, and the other partner, often the woman, focusing on unpaid domestic labour (Kamp Dush et al., 2018). This is in contrast to non-specialization, where couples participate equally in paid and unpaid work (Kamp Dush et al., 2018). With women taking more parental leave than men based on workplace policies and gender norms, following the birth of a child, specialization can increase. If women have not decreased their bargaining power through limiting access to resources such as paid income, and men are able to close the gap in terms of parenting competence, non-specialization should reoccur (Kamp Dush et al., 2018).

With men having traditionally specialized in paid work, they often out-earn their spouse, allowing them to bargain their way out of domestic and childcare work (Yavorsky et al., 2015). With many women reducing paid work hours and career advancement opportunities following the birth of a child, women's bargaining power is often reduced, resulting in less leverage in the negotiation process (Yavorsky et al., 2015).

Outcomes Impacting Women's Mental Health

The following section will explore outcomes of the inequitable division of domestic labour that negatively impact women's mental health. Those most prominently featured in the literature include the undervaluing of unpaid work, role strain and multitasking, invisible labour, and perceptions of inequity within the couple relationship.

The Undervaluing of Unpaid Work

Jung & O'Brien (2019) emphasized that despite the time consuming and difficult nature of housework and childcare, these responsibilities are often positioned as roles, not work, which devalues unpaid work in the home. This positioning reinforces gender inequalities, with paid work being prioritized over unpaid work and presented as the most important component of family life (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020). With domestic labour and childcare not being seen as work, women are often expected to engage in work continuously, leading to burnout and negative mental health implications (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). In contrast, men benefit from the perspective that paid employment is work, and domestic life equates to non-work time, allowing them to avoid contributing equally to domestic labour and childcare responsibilities (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2020).

Role Strain Theory and Multitasking

Within dual-earner couples, the literature highlighted that given deeply entrenched gender norms, during the transition to parenthood, women face increasing pressure to fulfill both the primary caregiver role, taking on the majority of parenting and housework, while also maintaining paid employment and achieving career goals (Yavorsky et al., 2015). Role strain theory has been broadly used to explore how unpaid labour and paid employment are associated with mental health (Xue & McMunn, 2021). According to role strain theory, human energy is limited. When energy demands exceed an individual's threshold, such as when demands from one role are too high, or too many roles are occupied, the likelihood of role strain increases and there is a greater chance of negative impacts on mental health (Xue & McMunn, 2021).

Research has also shown that mothers spend more time multitasking than fathers and that this discrepancy contributes to women feeling overwhelmed and overworked, in comparison with men (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). Multitasking is defined as “the simultaneous performance of several tasks or the rapid alteration between them that allows individuals to squeeze in more tasks and get more things done within a limited amount of time” (Moyser & Burlock, 2018, para. 10). Gender differences in time spent multitasking show that among dual-earner couples where partners work a minimum of 50 hours per week, nearly 86% of mothers indicated that they multitasked ‘most of the time’, versus 59% of men (Bianchi & Wight, 2010). Notably, for mothers, multitasking activities have been associated with higher levels of psychological distress and work-family conflict, in contrast to fathers multitasking which tends to involve less domestic labour and was not linked to negative mental health outcomes (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019).

Invisible Labour

Ciciolla & Luthar (2019) define invisible labour as the time spent thinking about household tasks and family responsibilities throughout the day. They note that in addition to shouldering the

majority of physical housework and childcare, mothers often also take on the role of primary household manager, which involves the psychological caretaking of family members, and overseeing the planning, anticipation and organization of household tasks. Due to its invisible nature, this mental and emotional labour is often overlooked and seldom positioned as a distinct component of domestic labour (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019).

In her book exploring parenting skills Crittenden (2004) captures the mental weight of invisible labour when naming the breadth of tasks included in this category of domestic labour.

“Daily psychological support and resolving problems; interceding with teachers and attending meetings and events at school; maintaining responsibility for routine medical care; coordinating sporting and other extracurricular activities; keeping a constant mental inventory of what’s needed in household (from light bulbs and toilet paper to gifts); assuring good family nutrition; keeping track of new clothes and shoes needed for children; planning events including bar and bat mitzvahs and birthday parties; coordinating transportation to and from school and extracurricular activities; overseeing care of pets; management of crises including trouble at school and accidents (and much more)” (Crittenden, 2004, p. 15).

In their study exploring how the division of invisible labour in the home is linked to women’s mental health, Ciciolla and Luthar (2019) found that the majority of women reported that they alone managed all tasks relating to household routines as well as specific aspects of childcare such as child adjustment and being attuned to children’s emotional needs. They also noted that feeling disproportionately responsible for managing the household and family member well-being was linked with negative personal well-being and decreased relationship satisfaction due to feelings of resentment towards spouses. Their study highlighted that women can feel

deeply resentful of their partners if spouses do not contribute equally to these ongoing, essential, and sometimes high-stress responsibilities.

Perceptions of Equity

Within heterosexual relationships, research has shown that perceptions of equity are often a stronger predictor of psychological distress than the actual division of unpaid work itself (Polachek & Wallace, 2015). Polachek & Wallace (2015) define perceptions of domestic equity as the degree to which each partner feels the division of domestic labour is fair. The perception of inequity within a partnership has been found to be detrimental to mental health with negative outcomes correlating with women's mental health, but not men's (Janzen & Hellsten, 2021; Polachek & Wallace, 2015; Newkirk et al., 2017).

Unpaid care work has been depicted as a less prestigious activity that is also physically demanding and isolating. If one partner is doing the bulk of unpaid care work, this may engender feelings of inequity and injustice in a relationship, and potentially impact psychological distress (Xue & McMunn, 2021, p. 11).

Research has found that often, partners can consider an objectively unequal division of domestic labour to be fair (Charbonneau et al., 2019). Baxter (2000) suggested that gendered expectations about the division of labour may influence women not to expect to share household tasks equally with their partners. Her study found that among heterosexual couples, men who reported the division of domestic labour to be fair, spent roughly half the amount of time on housework as their wives. A study by Carriero and Todesco (2017) found that 55% of both partners considered the division of housework to be fair, even when the division was unequal.

In Polachek and Wallace's (2015) study exploring perceptions of domestic equity and mental health, they found significant gender gaps in perceptions of fairness with women being

more likely to view the division of domestic labour as unfair to themselves, and men more likely to view the division as unfair to their partner. This demonstrates that men and women acknowledge that women take on a greater portion of unpaid work. Despite these findings, more than 50% of men and women in this study reported that the division of domestic labour was equitably distributed between partners. Importantly, this study's findings suggested that the perception that the division of domestic labour was unfair to oneself was significantly associated with poorer mental health. This highlights that regardless of the division of labour itself, the perception of unfairness is a source of psychological distress (Polacheck & Wallace, 2015).

Relational Well-Being

Focusing on the powerful influence that perceptions of equity have on relational well-being during the transition to parenthood, research has found gendered discrepancies in relationship satisfaction. Schieman et al. (2018) who examined the association between gender discrepancies and relationship quality found that a gender gap exists in relationship satisfaction due to "mothers' greater perceptions that parenting was unfairly divided" (p.60). The perception of unfairness in the division of childcare and housework was a core factor for women in evaluating their relational well-being throughout the transition to parenthood and has been associated with relational conflicts, lower relational satisfaction and a higher likelihood of divorce, as well as anger, depression and unhappiness (Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Lively et al., 2010). Furthermore, perceived unfairness in the division of household tasks can have mental health outcomes for both partners. Charbonneau et al. (2019) highlights that perceptions of inequity can result in the partner who is disadvantaged from managing the majority of unpaid labour feeling anger and resentment, and the partner who is benefitting from less unpaid labour feeling guilt and shame.

Chapter Summary

Although dual-earner couples have become the norm, social and structural factors have sustained a gendered and unequal division of domestic labour among heterosexual couples. The transition to parenthood has been shown to magnify these discrepancies as men and women tend to fulfill traditional gender role expectations. Implications of these inequities put women at higher risk of negative mental health outcomes including depression, role overload, psychological distress, and postpartum depression. The following chapter will discuss the literature findings and outline recommendations to support women, parents, couples and families impacted by these issues.

Chapter Three: Discussion and Application

Discussion

The purpose of this capstone is to explore the socio-cultural, structural and psychological factors contributing to the unequal division of domestic labour among dual-earner heterosexual couples throughout parenthood in order to gain a deeper understanding of how best to support women, couples, and families impacted by this issue. The following discussion will revisit the research questions guiding this work and discuss key findings.

How Does the Transition to Parenthood Impact the Division of Domestic Labour Among Dual-Earner Heterosexual Couples?

The literature emphasized that the transition to parenthood is a key contributor in producing and magnifying gender discrepancies in the division of domestic labour. It highlighted that as housework and childcare demands drastically increase following the birth of a child, women take on the majority of this labour, even in couples who prior to welcoming a child, equally divided workloads (Yavorsky et al., 2015). It was noted that even in couples who actively seek to embrace a more egalitarian stance on the division of labour, end up returning to traditional gender norms and genderized task allocations with men prioritizing the breadwinner role and women the primary caregiver role (Kamp Dush et al., 2018). This point highlights the incredibly powerful role of internalized gender norms and the need for more proactive and open discussion on this topic as parents and couples prepare for the birth of a child and throughout the transition to parenthood.

Another important finding relating to the impact of parenthood on the division of labour was the suggestion that throughout the early days of parenting, gender performances within the couple dynamic can be cemented for years to come (Kamp Dush et al., 2018; Riggs &

Bartholomaeus, 2020; Yavorsky et al., 2015). The enduring impact of how couples navigate the division of labour during this pivotal life transition demonstrates how crucial early awareness, visibility, and dialogue surrounding gender discrepancies is in promoting equality within the partnership now and for the future.

What are the Key Socio-Cultural, Structural, and Psychological Factors Contributing to and Maintaining the Unequal Division of Labour?

The primary themes that emerged from the literature in relation to key factors contributing to gender discrepancies in the division of labour included gender, institutional frameworks and workplace policies, and power dynamics.

Gender. As referenced throughout the literature, regardless of an individual's own beliefs relating to gender norms, within a gendered society, structural frameworks and dominant discourse can influence how couples "do gender" and allocate housework and childcare responsibilities. Although couples may want to challenge dominant norms, they may feel judged if they do not comply with traditional gender roles. Another key finding was the notion that domestic tasks are implicitly gendered with female tasks being more repetitive, time consuming and non-optional, and male tasks being less frequent, time consuming and more flexible (Jung & O'Brien, 2017). The implicit and unspoken nature of gender-role compliance was something that stood out in the research. A key takeaway relating to gender as a primary driver of inequality in the division of labour is the need to create conscious choice in how tasks are being divided.

The finding that following the birth of a child, men spend more than double the amount of time than women on leisure activities, is also an important one to highlight as it has strong repercussions for women's mental health (Kamp Dush et al., 2018). For couples with young children, men benefitting from more leisure time, results in women having less opportunity to

engage in exercise, social interaction, and other self-care activities that could improve well-being and reduce stress. This highlights the critical need to prioritize non-work time, self-care and support for mothers.

Institutional Frameworks and Workplace Policies. The literature emphasized the fundamental role of workplace policies in reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes and maintaining an inequitable division of domestic labour among dual-earner couples, with paternity leave being a primary focal point. Although parental leave options in Canada offer couples the ability to share 35 weeks of leave, the majority of this time is taken by mothers. Less than half of Canadian fathers take leave and those who do, return to work within 5 weeks or less (Statistics Canada, 2021). The literature suggested that because men are not tied to the physical demands of birth such as breastfeeding and recovery, their decision on whether to take leave is more optional and open to socio-cultural influences such as negative stigmas associated with men taking paternity leave (Kinney, 2019). An interesting finding in the literature was the notion that this stigma is founded in negative perceptions of men not complying with stereotypical male gender roles (Berdal & Moon, 2013; Kinney, 2019). Men who choose to take paternity leave are prioritizing family over work and thus, violating the traditionally expected prioritization of the breadwinner role. This perpetuation of gender stereotypes often results in men maintaining the role of financial provider and women adopting the more traditional primary caregiver role, impacting the division of domestic labour, women's career and earning potential, and power dynamics within the relationship.

This section of the literature review demonstrated how deeply rooted stereotypic gender norms are and the pivotal role they play in dictating behaviour. In order to reduce the negative stigma associated with men taking parental leave, support for flexibility in men's working

arrangements needs to become the norm. Furthermore, for dual-earner couples, the implicit, unspoken assumption that women should take the majority of parental leave needs to be explored.

Power Dynamics. An important finding in the literature was the suggestion that while one partner having more access to resources such as income or education, as well as more time availability outside of paid work hours, could impact power relations, spousal bargaining, and the division of tasks, it does not explain why women continue to shoulder the majority of domestic labour when they earn higher incomes or have less time available than their partners (Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Yavorsky et al., 2015). This point, once again, highlights the powerful role of gender socialization as a driver of inequity, its implicit nature, and the need for reflection and active dialogue among partners on how power is held and leveraged within the relationship.

What Specific Outcomes of Gendered Domestic Labour Discrepancies Foster Negative Mental Health Implications for Women?

In relation to the inequitable division of labour, the undervaluing of unpaid work, role strain and multitasking, invisible labour, and perceptions of inequity within the couple relationship, were the most prominently discussed outcomes associated with negative mental health implications for women. Some of the key takeaways from this section of the literature review were the invisible nature of unpaid work, the lack of value that is placed on how it contributes to the overall functioning of the household and ongoing care of family members, and how this perspective leads to overwhelm, burnout, and psychological distress in women. An important reference from the literature was the finding that in many cases, partners consider an objectively unequal division of labour to be fair and that gendered expectations of how labour

will be divided can result in women not expecting an equal split (Baxter, 2000; Charbonneau et al., 2019).

Limitations

This capstone focused on research exploring the division of domestic labour among heterosexual, dual-earner couples. A key limitation of this research is based on the specificity of the population it is examining. Heterosexual couples were chosen with the goal of exploring the role of traditional gender norms and stereotypes, however this excludes many women, parents, and couples from the LGBTQIA2S+ community who may be impacted by an inequitable division of domestic labour. While looking at dual-earner couples allowed for a clearer examination of the influences of gender in how couples divide housework and childcare responsibilities, it also focused the research on a population that is likely more educated and has access to enhanced resources and supports, which may cause the findings to be limited in their generalizability to broader populations.

Considering the various socio-cultural factors that could impact women's mental health in early parenthood, an additional limitation was the research's focus on gender and exclusion of other influential factors such as race, socio-economic status, able bodiedness, neurodivergence, and sexuality. With this research leveraging a feminist theoretical framework, this is an important limitation to note based on the emphasis that feminist therapy places on intersectionality. A concept that acknowledges an individual's multiple social identities and how these intersect and shape experiences and mental health (Moyet, 2024).

Future Research

Future directions for research could include an in-depth look at how intersectionality impacts the division of domestic labour and subsequent mental health implications. Research

could focus on different racial groups, couples from diverse educational and income groups, and same-sex, gender fluid, or transgender couples in order to assess how inequalities relating to the division of labour impacts marginalized populations.

Research on how same-sex couples divide domestic labour has demonstrated a more equal split (van der Vleuten et al., 2020). An interesting direction for future research could be examining spousal bargaining and how same-sex couples negotiate the division of labour, as well as how as the implication of a more equitable sharing of domestic tasks impacts mental health.

Application

Based on the findings from the literature review, the following section outlines therapeutic goals, the role of the therapist, and recommendations for mental health practitioners working with women, parents, couples, and families impacted by negative mental health outcomes associated with gender discrepancies in the division of domestic labour. This section explores the final research question: What treatment options and best practices would best support working with this population?

Therapeutic Goals

Prior to exploring the final research question and recommendations for mental health practitioners working with this population, it is important to examine therapeutic goals in approaching this work from a feminist lens. A feminist approach to counselling centers on the idea that “The key to a healthy individual lies in recognizing the negative effects of a male-dominated society on women’s self-concept and on establishing a more egalitarian power balance with men” (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018, p. 323). With this context in mind, the primary therapeutic goals when working from a feminist framework include:

- fostering enhanced awareness for both women and men of the impact of gender norms and inequalities;
- empowering women to practice assertiveness and reclaim power;
- developing relationships based in equality; and
- strengthening communication (Smith, 2019).

Role of the Therapist

Working from a feminist framework, mental health practitioners working with this population must acknowledge and reduce imbalances of power within the therapeutic relationship. Practitioners should foster an authentic, non-hierarchical alliance that emphasizes mutuality, equality, and egalitarian ideals. They must also recognize the systems of oppression that maintain inequalities and advocate to dismantle and reduce their impact.

Recommendations

Making the Invisible, Visible: Increasing Awareness of Gender Norms and Discrepancies. “Many men are grappling with the idea of increased engagement, but both fathers and mothers may be unaware of the processes that discourage or enable it” (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006, p. 34). As noted in the discussion, the tendency for heterosexual couples transitioning to parenthood to revert to more traditional gender norms often occurs implicitly, without each partner intentionally and knowingly choosing to comply with these roles. In working with women, couples, and families impacted by this issue, it is important to support clients in increasing their awareness of the powerful role of gender norms and how they influence behaviours relating to the division of domestic labour.

Mental health practitioners can encourage this by supporting clients to explore beliefs and assumptions relating to gender roles and paid and unpaid work. Session discussions could focus

on the basis of these beliefs including family of origin and intergenerational perspectives, as well as media positioning, cultural influences, and workplace norms. For the purpose of creating heightened awareness of potential gender discrepancies relating to the division of labour, reflection could also consider the impact of these influences on the allocation of housework and childcare tasks within the partnership and whether they are favourable to both partners or have resulted in one partner shouldering the bulk of domestic tasks. By making patterns of inequality more visible, women and their partners have more agency over whether they want to maintain them or make changes.

Promoting Egalitarian Ideals: Creating Conscious Choice in Task Allocation. Without conscious discussion of how couples will divide domestic labour, many partners end up reverting to stereotypic gender roles, unintentionally falling into patterns that reduce equality (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006). Mental health practitioners can support clients in creating a stronger sense of agency and control over household and childcare task allocation by encouraging discussion that acknowledges alternative possibilities and choice. Practitioners can ask questions about how a couple makes decisions regarding household responsibilities and childcare, and foster discussion on the implications and consequences of these decisions.

It is also recommended that clients be encouraged to map out and negotiate an equitable division of labour that is considered fair by both partners. Focusing questions on power dynamics within the relationship and how those may be impacting spousal bargaining is also important. Given the fundamental role that the transition to parenthood plays in cementing gender performances within the relationship, this planning would ideally occur early in the process prior to welcoming a baby, and at regular intervals post-birth. Educating on the tendency for many couples to revert to more traditional gender norms following the birth of a child is also

important to encourage future conversations relating to any perceptions of unfairness that may come up. An important consideration to note for practitioners working with couples on this issue, is to assess for safety and risk of interpersonal violence within the relationship prior to moving forward.

A first step in supporting clients in negotiating an equitable division of labour, would be to develop a list of all of the housework, childcare, and invisible tasks relating to the running of the household and caring for family members. Given the invisible nature of many domestic labour tasks, this exercise would help build awareness for both partners on the volume of tasks that need tending. A second step could involve identifying the amount of paid work time each partner is committed to, as well as how much of non-work time each partner is spending on unpaid work, versus leisure. This step would help enhance visibility on the amount of time each partner is allocating to each category. The third step would involve having an open dialogue on each partners strengths, preferences, and time availability to begin to map out task allocation. The goal here is not necessarily to strive for a 50/50 division, but for an equitable distribution that feels fair to each partner.

Reinforcing the Value of Women's Unpaid and Paid Work. In their study exploring the division of labour among first time parents, Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2020) questioned what it means to provide for a family. They noted that the etymology of the word 'provide' is from the Latin 'providere,' meaning to 'foresee' and 'attend to,' tasks that, as noted in the literature review, are generally fulfilled by mothers who are more likely to be responsible for pre-empting and attending to children's needs. In working with women and couples, it is recommended that mental health practitioners engage clients in discussion on what it means to provide, as well as the value of unpaid work and why in some circumstances it may be

overlooked and unappreciated. Given the prioritization of paid work over unpaid work, practitioners can focus questions on how both paid and unpaid work contribute to maintaining the household and the physical and emotional well-being of children and family members.

Furthermore, Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) note that within heterosexual couples, men's paid work is often prioritized over women's, leading to men taking on less domestic labour tasks. For working mothers, due to stereotypic gender roles, this can result in women experiencing role strain and feeling immense pressure to carry the primary caregiver role while also performing at work. Reflection centered on the client's belief system in relation to traditional gender roles, as well as power relations within the couple dynamic relating to disparities in income, education, or time availability outside of paid work hours could be beneficial in building awareness of gender discrepancies and reinforcing the value of both partners' unpaid and paid work.

Mothering Mothers. As noted in the discussion, an important finding in the literature was the reference to men benefitting from double the amount of leisure time than women, limiting the opportunity for mothers to engage in exercise, social interaction, and general self-care activities. Ciciolla and Luthar (2019) highlighted the importance of "mothering mothers." They noted the crucial need for mothers to "receive the nurturance, care, and replenishment that they are expected to put out for so many others" (p.19). For working mothers navigating the demands of work and home life, their study also highlighted the important role that consistent access to reliable authentic connections can play in reducing burnout and stress, and in improving mental health.

It would seem useful, therefore, for society to consider not just the magnitude of responsibilities mothers take on at home and at work, but equally, the degree to which

mothers have opportunities to prioritize and make time for authentic connections with others to replenish themselves (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019, p.19).

It is recommended that mental health practitioners working with this population support clients in exploring how leisure time for each partner is prioritized within the couple relationship. If one partner is benefitting from a disproportionate amount of leisure time, practitioners can encourage discussion around why this may be, what barriers are limiting the other partner from accessing more non-work time, and what changes or other supports may be needed to shift this.

Mental health practitioners could encourage mothers to develop a list of non-work activities that provide the opportunity to rest and replenish, such as exercise, connecting with friends and family, or other self-care activities. Specific times during the week could be scheduled that would allow mothers to take uninterrupted time for themselves and would ensure that couples have the needed support in place for childcare. If time and resource limitations do not allow for additional activities to be added to the family's schedule, practitioners can support mothers in brainstorming ways to incorporate micro moments of rest and restoration into their day. These meaningful moments only take a few minutes and can help clients feel grounded. Examples could include a short meditation, breathwork, sitting in silence and enjoying a hot coffee, or stretching. Given the noted importance of consistent access to authentic and reliable connections, practitioners could also research and recommend local support groups for mothers with young children.

Advocating for Equitable Institutional Frameworks and Workplace Policies. As highlighted, institutional frameworks and workplace policies play a pivotal role in reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes and maintaining an inequitable division of domestic labour. Although in Canada, fathers have access to considerable parental leave, women end up taking the

majority of this time, in large part due to the negative stigma associated with men prioritizing family over work (Kinney, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2021).

The normalization of men having flexible working arrangements such as part time work, taking time off to navigate family requirements such as children's medical appointments or sick days, as well as parental leave, is a key component of reducing this stigma. Mental health practitioners need to engage in advocacy with employers, schools, universities, medical practitioners, and government in order to educate on the benefits of paternity leave for men, women, and children. Incorporating education on this topic early in the lifespan, among youth in schools and universities, could help begin to normalize men taking on traditionally female-oriented unpaid labour tasks and promote equity in home and work settings.

Additionally, whether working with an individual or a couple, prior to the birth of a baby, practitioners can foster discussion around parental leave focusing on the clients' potential biases or assumptions relating to each partner taking leave, the benefits and challenges from a personal and professional context of each person taking time off, and how a couple plans to navigate leave-taking decisions. The primary goal being to reduce gender-based assumptions and create conscious choice on who takes leave and for how long.

Conclusion

To conclude, this capstone emphasized the current and ongoing gender discrepancies that exist in how dual-earner, heterosexual couples divide domestic labour, especially throughout the transition to parenthood. It highlighted the fundamental role that stereotypic gender constructs, institutional frameworks and workplace policies, and power dynamics play in driving inequalities and maintaining traditional gender roles. The gendered and unequal division of unpaid labour has detrimental effects on women's mental health and has been associated with depression, psychological distress, role overload, and postpartum depression (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Jung & O'Brien, 2017; Seedat & Rondon, 2021).

Mental health practitioners can support women, couples and families in achieving a more equitable division of labour by increasing visibility of discrepancies and gender norms, promoting egalitarian ideals, reinforcing the value of women's work, supporting mothers' self-care and relational needs, and in advocating for more flexible workplace policies that decrease negative stigma attached to men taking parental leave.

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