

No. 33/1979

September 24, 1979

NORTHERN EUROPEANS MAKE THE BEST HUSBANDS - SURVEY FINDS

British, Dutch and Danish men make the best husbands; Italians the worst. This is one of the main conclusions of a recent public opinion survey carried out in the nine member countries of the European Community for the EC Commission in Brussels. The study, entitled "Women and Men of Europe 1978" was designed to find out men's and women's attitudes to certain problems of modern-day society.

According to the survey, a full 85 per cent of British husbands say they are willing to do the washing up and nearly one in three claim they don't mind changing the baby's diapers or doing the ironing. Dutch and Danish men are only slightly less enthusiastic about helping out with such chores. By contrast, however, only one in five Italian husbands believes he should wash the dishes and a mere 13 and 6 per cent of Italians, respectively, will change a diaper or do the ironing (Table 1).

Predictably, though, all European men are much more willing to take on relatively simple tasks like washing up and shopping. They don't really mind organizing a meal or cleaning the house for their spouses. But the vast majority object to the more unpleasant household chores like changing diapers and ironing.

So much for intentions. In the survey men and women were also asked how much help men actually gave around the home. Not surprisingly the men claimed to be more helpful than their wives would give them credit for. In Belgium, for example, while 82 per cent of men claimed they helped "often" or "sometimes" with the housework, only 68 per cent of wives agreed that this was the case. The margin of male exaggeration was particularly great in Italy where there was a 21 per cent gap between the answers given by men and women.

This section of the survey confirmed, however, that British, Dutch and Danish husbands helped most with the housework and Italians the least. It seems that young couples and especially the better educated more readily share the housework.

HOUSEWIVES QUITE ENJOY THEIR WORK

One surprising aspect of the survey perhaps was the discovery that housewives in Western Europe, generally, are satisfied with their lot. Indeed job satisfaction among housewives is slightly greater than among working men or women. Housewives in Ireland and Belgium are the most contented, as are married women under thirty without children.

Nevertheless, nearly one in two housewives do regret not having a job. French and Italian women are more likely to regret not having a paid job than women in other countries of the European Community. Women who most regret not working seem to be young and unmarried and those of all ages who are divorced or separated.

The main reason given by women for not having a paid job is that of family responsibilities. One out of every two housewives who regret not having a paid job cites this reason. The second most frequent reason mentioned is that the husband wants his wife to stay at home.

WORKING WOMEN MORE EXHAUSTED THAN MEN

Among working women job satisfaction is relatively high, particularly in Ireland, Denmark and Belgium. Generally speaking working women seem as satisfied with their lot as their male counterparts.

Nevertheless, women do believe they have less chance of promotion than men and more say they are worn out at the end of the day. In most of the countries studied, women would be less inclined than men to continue working if they had enough money to live comfortably. Moreover, more women than men consider that a person of the opposite sex could, with the necessary training, do their job.

BRITISH AND IRISH WOMEN FIGHT HARDEST FOR THEIR RIGHTS

The survey also looked at male and female attitudes to women in politics at the local and national level. Men and women were asked whether things would go better or worse if there were considerably more women on local councils and in national parliaments. Generally speaking the majority of men and women alike replied that it would make little or no difference. Naturally enough, though, there was a general tendency for more women than men to reply that "things would be better" if there were more female representatives.

In two countries in particular -- Britain and Ireland -- a clear majority of women thought "things would go better" if their sex were better represented while the majority of men felt it would make no difference. The survey comments:

"The men (in these two countries) do not perceive the problem as a source of conflict, but the women are fighting for their rights".

At the other end of the scale, most women in Italy and Luxembourg believed greater female participation in politics would make no difference, while most men thought this would make things worse. "These countries would therefore appear to be the least advanced", the survey surmised.

In a third group of countries -- Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium - a majority of both men and women believe it would make little or no difference if there were appreciably more women politicians. In these countries, the survey comments, "there is a kind of egalitarian consensus not to dramatize a problem which appears not to be seen as a source of conflict".

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TABLE I

JOBS WHICH MEN THINK IT WOULD BE REASONABLE FOR THEM TO TAKE OVER FREQUENTLY FROM THEIR WIVES

	Belgium %	Denmark %	Germany %	France %	Ireland %	Italy %	Luxem. %	Nether. %	Uni. King, %	EC Average %
Do the shopping	63	67	77	71	63	71	47	81	74	73
Do the washing-up	55	62	47	53	67	21	41	80	85	53
Organize a meal	35	37	28	40	40	43	37	52	62	43
Clean the house	36	46	29	44	39	29	32	57	57	40
Stay home to care for sick child	27	31	17	30	27	37	29	30	37	30
Change baby's diapers	19	25	8	17	15	13	8	30	30	17
Do the ironing	7	19	7	14	11	6	7	15	29	14
None of these	17	20	12	9	10	11	17	6	3	9