

Housework gender differences may affect health in elderly men and women

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Elderly men across Europe and the US spend less time on housework than elderly women, according to a study published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*. Researchers at the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology found that elderly women on average spent almost five hours a day doing housework compared to only around three hours a day for elderly men. The study also found that while those who did more housework felt healthier, women who did long hours of housework combined with too much or too little sleep reported poorer health.

Nicholas Adjei (Doctoral Researcher in Public Health), the corresponding author said: "Engaging in a few hours of housework may be beneficial to the [health](#) of [older adults](#). However, we were surprised to see significant gender differences when looking at the combination of time spent on housework activities and time spent sleeping. Long periods of housework combined with too much or too little sleep - that is fewer than seven or more than eight hours of sleep, respectively - was associated with poor health among [elderly women](#), whereas in men the same was associated with good health."

The study found notable differences between the type of housework men and [women](#) spent time on. Across all countries included in this study, men spent less time cleaning, cooking and shopping than women (88.7 minutes a day compared to 217.9 minutes a day). However, women were found to spend less time on gardening and maintenance tasks than men (38.5 minutes a day compared to 68.8 minutes a day).

The researchers found that elderly women in Italy and Germany spent the most time on housework (around five hours a day), while women in the US spent the least amount of time doing housework (four hours a day). In contrast, [elderly men](#) in Italy spent the least amount of time on housework (2.7 hours a day) and German men spent the most time on housework (4.2 hours a day).

To examine the associations between time spent on [housework](#), time spent sleeping and health, the study used self-reported data from 15,333 men and 20,907 women aged 65 years and over from Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, France, the Netherlands and the US. Participants reported the total time they spent per day on 41 activities in 5, 10 or 15-minute intervals. They also reported the total amount of time they spent sleeping per day, as well as whether they felt they were in poor, fair, good or very good health. Nicholas Adjei said: "The percentage of those aged 65 years and above is increasing globally due to higher life expectancy. It is important to understand how older adults spend their [time](#) in these later years and the possible positive and negative implications for their health."

The authors caution that the cross-sectional, observational nature of the study does not allow for conclusions about cause and effect. While the study relied on self-reported data, previous research has demonstrated reliability and accuracy of this kind of data in reflecting current health status, according to the authors.

More information: Nicholas Kofi Adjei et al, Investigating the associations between productive housework activities, sleep hours and self-reported health among elderly men and women in western industrialised countries, *BMC Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-017-4979-z](#)

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