Domestic help and the gender division of domestic labor during the COVID-19 pandemic: Gender inequality among Japanese parents

Junko Nishimura

Ochanomizu University, Tokyo, Japan

Correspondence
Junko Nishimura, Ochanomizu University, Tokyo, Japan.
Email: nishimura.junko@ocha.ac.jp

Abstract
The enduring COVID-19 pandemic has gradually transformed our everyday lives. This study focuses on changes in work and family arrangements, with particular focus on changes in domestic help, and examines its impact on the division of domestic labor. Using a social survey of work and the family conducted in November 2020 and May 2021, the results show that from January 2020 (pre-pandemic) to May 2021, approximately 40% of respondents experienced a reduced gender gap for housework and childcare, while a large gender gap is still observed in the absolute frequency of undertaking domestic labor. Some lifestyle changes triggered by the pandemic, such as an increase in the use of takeaways or delivery meals, and the expansion of working from home, are found to be able to contribute a shift toward more equal sharing of domestic labor. However, the fact that the access to such lifestyle changes is more common among those with a relatively high income or high educational background suggests that the lifestyle changes imposed by the pandemic may exacerbate class disparities in the gender gap in domestic labor. Furthermore, the results show that decreased kinship support results in a greater childcare burden being placed on women.

KEYWORDS
division of domestic labor, domestic outsourcing, kinship support

1 | INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, has continues to endure. Since the onset of the pandemic our everyday lives have been gradually transformed. On the one hand,
working, learning, and meeting people online, while avoiding person-to-person contact has become part of our lives. On the other hand, any activity involving person-to-person contact has been regarded as offering a high risk of infection, and therefore to be avoided.

These changes in our everyday lives have also affected work and family arrangements in Japanese families. First, as adults spend more time at home the amount of domestic work to be done by the family members has increased and the allocation of the increased domestic chores must be decided among them.

Second, as the practice of working from home has expanded, the home has become both a place to work and a place for caregiving. This potentially enhances the reconciliation of work–family; as this proximity can create more time to do domestic chores by reducing adults’ commuting hours and increasing the possibility of using time flexibly during the day. On the other hand, working from home may also exacerbate a negative spillover between work and family, by carrying work-related stress into family life, and vice versa, as boundaries blur between the two spheres.

Third, the pandemic may have transformed the availability and forms of domestic help. The increased demand to avoid person-to-person contact has expanded the provision of “contactless” services such as takeaways or delivery meals and online shopping. The increased use of such services potentially mitigates the burden of domestic chores. However, it also means that domestic help with person-to-person contact may become less available. This would have considerable influence on caregiving, in which maintaining the quality of person-to-person contact is both necessary and important. With regard to childcare, after the April–May 2020 state of emergency was lifted, the Japanese government asked daycare centers and after-school children’s clubs to open in principle (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2021); however, many working parents often require additional childcare support that cannot be met by daycare support alone—such as when their children get sick or when they have to work unexpected overtime. In such cases, parents use babysitters and—particularly in Japan—kinship support (Tanihara et al., 2010). The pandemic may have limited the use of such support.

This study examines how these changes in work and family arrangements are related to changes in the division of domestic labor among Japanese parents, with a particular focus on the changes in domestic help.

Research on the division of domestic labor during the pandemic, particularly in its early stage, is increasing (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Shafer et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2021; Craig & Churchill, 2021; Nishimura et al., 2021). Several studies have been conducted on (i) who is assigned to perform the additional domestic labor and (ii) whether working from home promoted equal sharing of domestic labor between women and men. On the former, findings have been somewhat inconsistent. Some studies have reported that an increase in domestic work done by men has reduced the gender gap (Shafer et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2021), while others suggest that women’s share of childcare has not changed before and after the pandemic (Sevilla & Smith, 2020). Some research has found that the gender gap in housework has narrowed but widened in childcare (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020), whereas a related study has found the opposite in each aspect (Craig & Churchill, 2021).

As for the latter, a study in Canada showed that fathers who worked from home undertook an increased share of the housework and childcare (Shafer et al., 2020). In the USA, it was found that the increase in the time men spent working from home, or their shorter working hours or unemployment, led to an increase in fathers’ domestic work (Carlson et al., 2021). A study in Japan also showed that when men worked from home the gender gap for both housework and childcare was reduced (Nishimura et al., 2021). In addition, studies that assessed shifts in domestic labor found that the factors associated with a more equal sharing of domestic labor included both time availability factors, such as working from home, and factors related to spouses’ relative incomes and educational resources (Shafer et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2021; Nishimura et al., 2021).
Although these studies provided important insights into the changes in the gender gap in domestic labor during the pandemic, few studies have adequately examined the possibility that any changes in domestic help caused by the pandemic may have resulted in changes in sharing domestic labor. Increase in the use of services such as takeaways or delivery meals and online shopping may alleviate women’s domestic burdens, thereby enhancing shifts away from conventional arrangements of domestic labor. If the use of these services were more likely to be enhanced among those who can afford them, it might be that class disparities related to the gender gap in domestic labor have widened. Furthermore, the removal of kinship support may have encouraged men to become involved in childcare, thereby promoting a shift toward a more equal sharing of childcare. However, if kinship support was not replaced by fathers, mothers would have to take even greater responsibility for childcare.

Relying on a survey data collected in November 2020 and May 2021 from Japanese parents, this study examines changes in domestic help and its consequences for shifts in the division of domestic labor. By doing so, it provides important insights for understanding the consequences of the pandemic in Japan and for illuminating the potential fragility of conventional domestic arrangements taken by Japanese parents. The remainder of this study is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses trends in the use of domestic help prior to the pandemic and their impact on the division of domestic labor. Section 3 reviews trends in domestic help during the pandemic and presents the research questions. After describing the data, variables, and methods of analysis in Section 4, Section 5 presents the results of the analysis on the relationship between changes in domestic help and the division of domestic labor. Section 6 discusses whether there has been any shift in division of domestic labor, and what factors associated with the shift, if any. Finally, the potential widening of class disparities in the gender gap in domestic labor and the fragility of the “childcare strategies” used by Japanese women is discussed.

2 | DOMESTIC HELP AND THE DIVISION OF DOMESTIC LABOR BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

2.1 | Trends in the use of domestic outsourcing and kinship support

Domestic help is the use of paid or unpaid domestic labor from outside the household that would otherwise be performed by household members. This study deals with two types of domestic help: (i) domestic outsourcing and (ii) kinship support. Domestic outsourcing refers to commodifying what was previously produced in the home (Folbre & Bittman, 2004). It involves replacing unpaid household production with market substitutes. It can take various forms; and include help and services provided by people who are not household members (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2013), or the presence of domestic appliances (Van der Lippe et al., 2004). Given that the pandemic has increased the demand to avoid person-to-person contact, this study focuses primarily on the use of “contactless” services such as takeaways or delivery meals and online shopping (ordering daily necessities online and having them delivered).

Kinship support entails help with housework and childcare that is provided mainly by extended family members. Such support is often provided for free. Most providers of this support are elderly parents who are available to take care of their grandchildren. Although many Japanese parents raising young children receive kinship support for domestic work (Nishimura & Matsui, 2016), the pandemic may have made such support less available due to concerns about infecting elderly parents. Thus, changes in the use of kinship support are another focus of this study.

In general, domestic outsourcing has been increasing since before the pandemic, but this increase has been uneven among the different types of services. Kornrich and Roberts (2018)
focused on married couples in the U.S. between 1980 and 2010, and found that share of household expenditures on daycare, and gardening and lawn care increased over this 30-year period, while the share of household expenditure on babysitting declined. The share of household expenditures on housekeeping also increased, although only slightly. The authors also found that the share of the budget on pre-prepared food significantly increased. In Japan, Nagai (2016) found that the share of household expenditure on daycare, eating out, and buying pre-prepared food has increased since 1980s. The share of household expenditure on housekeeping has also increased, but only slightly (Nagai, 2016). It seems that there is a common trend in the Japan and the USA in that, although the outsourcing of cooking (in the form of pre-prepared foods) and childcare (in the form of daycare) has been increasing, the outsourcing of housework (in the form of home-visiting services) has increased gradually, but is not widely used.

Kinship support, however, is widely used, particularly by parents of young children. According to the National Fertility Survey, the percentage of couples who received childcare assistance from their husband’s or wife’s mothers before their first child turned 3 years of age was approximately 40% in the 1980s, roughly 50% in the 1990s, and above 50% since then (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2017). According to a survey of parents of children in daycare centers, Tanihara et al. (2010) found that 55% of the respondents would leave their children with their parents (who live apart from them) when their children were sick, which is far greater than the number of respondents who would leave their children with acquaintances or neighbors (1.3%) or babysitters (0.8%). This also indicates that extended family members serve as an important childcare resource.

2.2 Use of domestic outsourcing and its impact on the division of domestic labor

Various theories on outsourcing have argued that households use these services because they can replace money with time by purchasing the time of others (Gershuny, 2000). This leads to the hypothesis that the use of domestic outsourcing is more likely when households have relatively higher economic resources, and when they work relatively more hours a day (time constraints). In line with this hypothesis, previous research has shown that the high incomes of women and men are positively associated with their use of domestic outsourcing (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2013; Stancanelli & Stratton, 2014; Craig & Baxter, 2016), while the longer work hours of women and men, women’s full-time employment, and doble earner couples are associated with the use of paid help (Van der Lippe et al., 2004; Sullivan & Gershuny, 2013; Craig & Baxter, 2016).

In this context, what impact does domestic outsourcing have on the gender gap in domestic labor? Based on the current situation in which women generally take more responsibility for domestic work than men, it can be predicted that the use of domestic outsourcing may narrow the gender gap in domestic labor, particularly by reducing the time women spent on housework and childcare. However, empirical studies have had mixed results. According to Van der Lippe et al. (2004), the use of domestic outsourcing reduced Dutch women’s cleaning time by 1.5 h per week, but it had no effect on that of men. In the USA, eating out, housekeeping, and laundry services helped reduce women’s cooking and cleaning time, but not to any great extent (Killewald, 2011). In the UK, the purchase of housework and childcare services was not found to reduce the amount of time spent by either women or men on housework or childcare (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2013). Thus, due to the unclear impact of domestic outsourcing on women’s and men’s housework and childcare, the use of such outsourcing has not led to a more equal share of domestic labor for women and men (Craig & Baxter, 2016).
2.3 | Kinship support and its impact on the division of childcare

As mentioned earlier, many families with children receive help from their kin. In Japan, the likelihood of obtaining such help is related to the residential distance between extended family members and the children’s parents (Nishimura & Matsui, 2016; Yamane, 2017). Thus, in Japanese society, where childcare tends to be regarded as something that should be carried out by family members (Matsuki, 2013), extended family members offer assistance as long as they are physically available.

Then, what impact does the kinship support have on the division of childcare? Although recent studies did not directly examine the effect of the kinship support on women’s childcare time, they indicate that childcare assistance offered by grandparents can promote women’s employment (Senda, 2002; Nishimura & Matsui, 2016) by replacing part of women’s domestic responsibility. As for the impact of kinship support on the gendered division of domestic labor, Kubo (2012) found that husbands are less likely to share childcare when wives are dependent on their parents for urgent childcare. In other words, the kinship support may inhibit men’s involvement with childcare, which, in turn, may have a negative effect on the egalitarian sharing of childcare in the family.

3 | Domestic outsourcing and kinship support during the pandemic

The pandemic may have also changed traditional patterns of domestic help. Domestic outsourcing patterns may differ, depending on their type. Takeaways or delivery meals and the online purchases of daily necessities are expected to increase as the government continues to urge people to avoid person-to-person contact to prevent the spread of infection. For example, due to the new entrants to the service and expansion of service areas during the pandemic, the market in 2020 for delivery services was expected to exceed 600 billion yen in sales, which is a 44% increase on the previous year (NPD Japan Ltd., 2020). A survey conducted in November 2020 showed that, driven by this expansion, approximately 40% of respondents used meal delivery and purchased daily necessities online. Additionally, when restricted to users of these services, about 30% of the respondents said they had started using these services or increased the frequency of their use during the pandemic (Cross Marketing Inc., 2020). Meanwhile, according to the 2020 Family Income and Expenditure Survey, monthly expenditure on pre-prepared food by households of two or more persons increased by 2.5% on an annual basis (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021a), although it is not clear whether the pandemic had brought about this change, since its proportion has been rising since the early 2010s (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021b).

The use of housekeeping services and babysitters may have been discouraged during the pandemic. However, the increased time spent at home by the family may have increased their need for such services, encouraging their use. In regard to babysitters, in response to the nationwide closure of schools in the spring of 2020, the Japanese government raised the upper limit of subsidies to employers for their employees to use babysitters, while simultaneously expanding the scope of subsidies to include workers on personal contracts (Cabinet Office, Japan, 2020). According to the 2020 Family Income and Expenditure Survey, the monthly expenditure on “household services,” including housekeeping services and babysitting, increased by 1.9% on an annual basis, although the average amount spent on “household services” was only 889 JPY, and its contribution to the change rate of household expenditures in 2020 was 0.01% (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021a), suggesting that the use of such services has not been widespread.

In addition, support for housework and childcare by extended family members may have become less available during the pandemic, although there are no data to fully capture this aspect. However, a television program broadcasted by the Nippon Hoso Kyokai in October
2020 showed that some parents with children were concerned about infecting their elderly grandparents. Consequently, they were less likely to ask them for childcare support (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, 2020).

Based on this literature review, the pandemic has brought about different changes in traditional patterns of domestic help. However, it is still unclear who experienced what changes, and how these changes affected the division of domestic labor. Therefore, this study tries to answer the following research questions: (i) who experienced changes in domestic help during the pandemic? and (ii) how did these changes relate to the gender gap in the performance of domestic labor? To examine the first question, we focus on the relationship between economic resources and time constraint factors, and changes in the use of domestic outsourcing. In addition, we explore the relationship between living arrangements, time constraint factors, and kinship support. For the second question, we examine the relationship between changes in the use of domestic help and changes in the division of domestic labor.

4 | METHODS

4.1 | Data and samples

The analysis in this study utilizes data from the first and second waves of the Survey on Work and Life under COVID-19, which focused on individuals (aged 25–44 years) with spouses and children who were registered in the Trust Panel of the Japan Research Center. The Trust Panel is a database panel composed of randomly selected respondents to the Nippon Research Center Omnibus Survey who have agreed to continue to cooperate with other surveys in the future. As of October 2020, 70,000 people across Japan had registered to participate in the Trust Panel (Nippon Research Center, 2021).

The first wave of the survey was conducted between November 2 and 24, 2020, using a self-administered postal method. Altogether 626/1000 (62.6% response rate) samples were collected. The second survey, conducted from May 13 to June 3, 2021, was sent to the respondents of the first survey (excluding five people who had left the trust panel after completing the first survey). In total, 503/621 samples (81.0% response rate) were collected for the second wave. In this study, individuals who had responded to both the first and second waves of the surveys were analyzed. After excluding cases with missing values in the variables, 416 cases (245 women and 171 men) were included in the analysis. In the analysis of childcare, only cases in which the youngest child was 8 years or younger were included, resulting in 184 cases for women and 130 for men. The data are not a matched data with responses from both spouses. There is a study indicating the discrepancy in wives’ and husbands’ reports on housework; noting that husbands tend to overestimate their own contribution, but wives do not (Kamo, 2000). This study takes such bias into account, therefore, analyzes the women’s and men’s responses separately. For female respondents, the responses for “wives” refer to themselves, while for male respondents, “wives” refer to their spouses.

4.2 | Measures

4.2.1 | Domestic outsourcing and kinship support

The second wave of the survey collected information on changes in domestic outsourcing and kinship support, compared to those in January 2020 (before the spread of COVID-19). Specifically, this wave focused on the number of times the respondents used: (i) takeaways or delivery meal services; (ii) online shopping for daily necessities; (iii) visiting housekeeping services;
(iv) babysitters; and (v) received help with housework or childcare from extended family members. For these, respondents were asked to choose between “greatly increased,” “slightly increased,” “stayed the same,” “slightly decreased,” “greatly decreased,” and “never used.”

4.2.2 | Frequencies and the relative share of domestic labor between wives and husbands

The first wave of the survey, conducted in November 2020, asked about the frequency of housework and childcare among the respondents and their spouses as at January 2020, while the second wave of the survey, conducted in May 2021, asked the same question for May, the time of the survey.

The items to capture the frequency of housework and childcare in the questionnaire focused on variables that are strongly related to domestic outsourcing and kinship support, such as “preparing meals,” “doing the dishes,” “shopping for groceries,” “playing with children,” and “taking personal care of children.” For “preparing meals,” and “doing the dishes,” the answers were scored as follows: 20 times a week or more = 21; about 14–19 times a week = 16.5; about 7–13 times a week = 10, about 1–6 times a week = 3.5; and less than once a week = 0.001.3 Preparing meals and doing the dishes were referred to as “meal” by adding up their respective scores. For shopping for groceries, playing with children, and taking personal care of children, the answers were scored as follows: almost every day = 6.5; 4–5 times a week = 4.5; 2–3 times a week = 2.5; about once a week = 1; and less than once a week = 0.001. Shopping refers the score for shopping for groceries, while the scores for playing with children and taking personal care of children were added up and were referred to as “childcare.”

To capture the changes in the gender gap in domestic labor, we captured the relative share of domestic labor performed by wives through the following procedures: (i) the relative share of meal, shopping, and childcare performed by wives in January 2020 and May 2021 were calculated by dividing the wife’s scores by the total score of the wife and husband; and (ii) by comparing the relative share of the wife at the two time points, three categories were created: “increased,” “decreased,” and “no change.”

4.2.3 | Other independent and control variables

This study examined “resources” and “time availability” as factors that lead to changes in the use of outsourcing, as well as changes in the gender gap in domestic labor. The wives’ and husbands’ annual earnings in 2020 (in million yen), and the respondents’ educational backgrounds (whether or not they were educated beyond the junior college level) were used as variables indicating their resources. For variables measuring time availability, the wives’ employment status in May 2021 (regular/non-regular or self-employed/not employed), the husbands’ weekly working hours in May 2021, and a dummy variable for whether the husbands worked from home in May 2021 were used.4 The dummy variable for husbands working from home was coded 1 if husbands worked from home at least 1 day in May 2021; otherwise, it was coded 0.

When considering the changes in kinship support, a dummy variable for living with the wives’ or husbands’ parents was included as an independent variable in addition to the abovementioned variables.

The control variables included the number of children, a dummy variable for the youngest child under 6 years of age, the residential area, and the frequency of meal, shopping, and childcare in January 2020. Regarding residential area, the Tokyo metropolitan area and 12 major cities were defined as “big cities,” cities with a population of 100 000 or more were defined as “medium-sized cities,” cities with a population of less than 100 000 were defined as
“small cities,” and towns and villages were defined as “rural areas.” The descriptive statistics for the variables used in the multivariate analyses are shown in Table 1.

### 4.3 Analytical procedures

First, this study analyzes the changes in the use of domestic outsourcing and kinship support during the pandemic. Then, we conducted a logistic regression analysis to determine who increased their use of domestic outsourcing and who decreased their kinship support.

Next, we applied multinomial logit models to examine whether the increased use of domestic outsourcing and decreased kinship support were associated with the changes in the gender gap in domestic labor. The outcome variables were the change in wives’ relative share of meal, shopping, and childcare. With “no change” as the reference category for the dependent variable, we examined the effects of the changes in the use of domestic outsourcing and kinship support as well as the resources and time availability on increased or decreased wives’ relative share of domestic labor.

#### TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics

|                                             | Women (n = 245) |          | Men (n = 171) |          |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                                             | Mean  | SD     | Mean  | SD     |
| Increase in using takeaways or delivery meals | 0.45  | 0.41    | 0.41  | 0.30    |
| Increase in online shopping for groceries   | 0.37  | 0.30    | 0.37  | 0.16    |
| Wives’ earnings in 2020 (million yen)       | 1.29  | 1.57    | 1.23  | 1.52    |
| Husbands’ earnings in 2020 (million yen)    | 5.69  | 2.78    | 5.41  | 2.34    |
| Respondents’ junior college or more education | 0.52  | 0.51    | 0.52  | 0.47    |
| Wives’ employment status in May 2021        |      |        |      |        |
| Not employed                                | 0.23  | 0.26    | 0.23  | 0.26    |
| Regular employment                          | 0.24  | 0.26    | 0.24  | 0.26    |
| Non-regular employment, self-employed       | 0.53  | 0.47    | 0.53  | 0.47    |
| Husbands’ weekly work hour in May 2021      | 43.94 | 15.36   | 44.92 | 12.56   |
| Husbands working from home in May 2021      | 0.14  | 0.12    | 0.14  | 0.12    |
| Number of children                          | 2.21  | 0.75    | 2.10  | 0.76    |
| Youngest child younger than 6-years old      | 0.58  | 0.64    | 0.58  | 0.64    |
| Residential area                             |      |        |      |        |
| Big city                                     | 0.32  | 0.30    | 0.32  | 0.30    |
| Medium-sized city                            | 0.43  | 0.36    | 0.43  | 0.36    |
| Small-sized city                             | 0.16  | 0.25    | 0.16  | 0.25    |
| Rural area                                   | 0.09  | 0.09    | 0.09  | 0.09    |
| Frequencies of wives’ “meal” in Jan 2020    | 35.38 | 8.09    | 33.66 | 10.51   |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “meal” in Jan 2020 | 5.01  | 7.31    | 7.75  | 9.12    |
| Frequencies of wives’ “shopping” in Jan 2020| 3.28  | 1.68    | 3.08  | 1.79    |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “shopping” in Jan 2020 | 0.76  | 1.10    | 1.30  | 1.40    |

|                                             | Women (n = 184) |          | Men (n = 130) |          |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                                             | Mean  | SD     | Mean  | SD     |
| Decrease in kinship support                 | 0.16  | 0.10    | 0.16  | 0.10    |
| Living with wives’ or husbands’ parents     | 0.11  | 0.11    | 0.11  | 0.11    |

*Note: Standard deviations reported only for continuous variables.*
5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows the changes in respondents’ use of domestic outsourcing and kinship support between January 2020 and May 2021. In this table, greatly increased and slightly increased were grouped together as “increased,” while slightly decreased and greatly decreased were grouped together as “decreased.” This table shows that the use of domestic outsourcing differs between takeaway or delivery meals, online shopping for groceries, and housekeeping and babysitting services. For example, in the first two categories, 8.6% and 15.9% of female respondents had never used takeaway or delivery meals and online shopping, respectively, but in the latter two categories, 93.5% and 95.1% had never housekeeping services, and babysitting services, respectively. The same tendency was observed among male respondents. This shows that housework and childcare services provided by visiting service providers were used by only a limited number of respondents.

Did the use of takeaway or delivery meals and online shopping for groceries change during the pandemic? This table shows that 45.3% and 37.1% of women increased the use of takeaway or delivery meals and online shopping for groceries, respectively. For men, 41.0% and 30.4% increased the use of takeaway or delivery meals, and online shopping, respectively. This suggests that the pandemic enhanced the use of contactless domestic outsourcing.

Furthermore, when examining kinship support, while 15.8% of women reported that such support had decreased and 14.1% said that it had increased during the pandemic. This suggests that some women avoided asking their elderly parents for help due to concerns about infecting them, whereas others increased their use of such support, possibly because of the increased demand for housework and childcare. For men, only 10.0% of the respondents stated that their support decreased and 6.9% reported that it had increased. This seems to be related to the fact that support for domestic labor by kin is utilized to reduce the burden of women’s housework and childcare.

Table 3 shows the changes in the frequency and in wives’ share of housework and childcare between the two time points. It appears that more men than women who increased in the frequency of “meal” and “childcare”. For example, while 38.6% of men increased their frequency

Table 2  Percentage of responses about changes in purchasing or receiving domestic help during January 2020 and May 2021

|                      | Women (n = 245) |                      | Men (n = 171) |                      |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|
|                      | Increased      | No change            | Decreased    | Never used           |
| Takeaway or delivery meals | 45.3           | 40.4                 | 5.7          | 8.6                  |
| Online shopping for groceries | 37.1           | 43.4                 | 3.3          | 15.9                 |
| Housekeeping services | 0.0            | 5.3                  | 1.2          | 93.5                 |
| Babysitting services | 1.1            | 2.7                  | 1.1          | 95.1                 |
| Support for housework and childcare from extended family members | 14.1           | 29.9                 | 15.8         | 40.2                 |

*Based on women (n = 184) and men (n = 130) whose youngest child is 8-years old or younger.
of “meal”, only 20% of women did so. In addition, 38.5% of men increased in the frequency of “childcare,” while only 14.1% of women did so. Due to these differences in behavioral changes between women and men in “meal” and “childcare”, 45.7% of women and 47.4% of men who decreased the share of “meal” performed by wives.

For “childcare”, 48.4% of women and 42.3% of men decreased in wives’ share of “childcare”. With regards to “shopping”, more women than men decreased its frequency (29.8% of women and 14.6% of men). This may have led to a decrease in the gender gap in shopping for some women and men; there are 42.5% of women, and 30.4% of men who decreased wives’ share of “shopping”.

As it indicated above, around 40% of respondents decreased in wives’ share of “meal”, “shopping”, and “childcare” (except for men’s response to “shopping”) during the roughly one-year period after the pandemic. This may suggest there has been a shift toward more egalitarian sharing of domestic labor. However, a large gender gap can still be observed in the absolute frequency of domestic labor. For example, the mean values of meals in May 2021 (not shown in the table) are 34.8 and 9.6 for women and men, respectively. This implies that although there

| TABLE 3 | Distribution of the changes in frequencies of, and gender gap for housework and childcare between January 2020 and May 2021: Women’s and men’s responses |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Changes in the frequency of “meal” | Women (n = 245) | Men (n = 171) |
| No change | 52.7 | 39.2 |
| Increased | 20.0 | 38.6 |
| Decreased | 27.4 | 22.2 |
| Changes in the share of “meal” performed by wives | | |
| No change | 27.4 | 22.2 |
| Increased | 26.9 | 30.4 |
| Decreased | 45.7 | 47.4 |
| Changes in the frequency of “shopping” | | |
| No change | 56.7 | 64.9 |
| Increased | 13.5 | 20.5 |
| Decreased | 29.8 | 14.6 |
| Changes in the share of “shopping” performed by wives | | |
| No change | 35.9 | 47.4 |
| Increased | 21.6 | 22.2 |
| Decreased | 42.5 | 30.4 |
| Changes in the frequency of “childcare” | | |
| No change | 66.3 | 33.9 |
| Increased | 14.1 | 38.5 |
| Decreased | 19.6 | 27.7 |
| Changes in the share of “childcare” performed by wives | | |
| No change | 22.3 | 27.7 |
| Increased | 29.4 | 30.0 |
| Decreased | 48.4 | 42.3 |

Note: All values are in percentages.
were some shifts toward more equal sharing between husbands and wives of housework and childcare, the magnitude of change is rather modest and is not enough to have transformed gender inequality in the performance of domestic chores.

5.2 Who increased domestic outsourcing and decreased kinship support?

Table 4 presents the results of a logistic regression analysis regarding the increase in takeaways or delivery meals and online shopping for groceries in female and male respondents. Since the pseudo $R$-squared values were relatively small in all the models, they do not necessarily explain the increase in takeaways or delivery meals and online shopping for groceries. However, some interesting tendencies were found in the resource and time availability factors.

In the female responses, the use of takeaways or delivery meals increased when the husband’s income was higher and when the youngest child was 6 years of age or younger. In other words, the economic affordability of these items provided by husband’s income and the time constraints imposed on mothers by the presence of young children increased women’s food outsourcing during the pandemic. However, this trend was not clearly observed among men. The increase in online shopping was associated with a higher educational background for both

| Table 4 | Logistic regression models predicting increase in domestic outsourcing |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------|
|         | Women                                                                 | Men                                                                 |
|         | Increase in takeaway or delivery meals | Increase in online shopping | Increase in takeaway or delivery meals | Increase in online shopping |
| Wives’ earnings in 2020 | -0.106 0.142 | -0.235 0.148 | 0.230 0.164 | -0.154 0.171 |
| Husbands’ earnings in 2020 | 0.129** 0.057 | -0.013 0.051 | 0.003 0.077 | 0.154 0.171 |
| Respondents’ junior college or more education | 0.196 0.280 | 0.594** 0.290 | -0.223 0.337 | 0.819** 0.372 |
| Wives’ employment status in May 2021 (Ref. not employed) |         |         |         |         |
| Regular employment | 0.367 0.609 | 0.666 0.614 | -0.577 0.695 | 1.370* 0.727 |
| Non-regular employment, self-employed | 0.663* 0.368 | 0.091 0.368 | 0.316 0.438 | 0.741 0.495 |
| Husbands’ weekly work hour in May 2021 | -0.003 0.009 | 0.001 0.009 | 0.009 0.013 | 0.007 0.015 |
| Youngest child younger than 6-years old | 0.653* 0.295 | -0.220 0.298 | 0.406 0.359 | -0.220 0.385 |
| Residential area (ref. medium-sized city) |         |         |         |         |
| Big city | -0.026 0.318 | 0.712** 0.327 | 0.123 0.395 | 0.230 0.427 |
| Small-sized city | 0.336 0.395 | 0.687* 0.402 | 0.473 0.420 | 0.364 0.456 |
| Rural area | 0.141 0.485 | 0.730 0.489 | 0.500 0.615 | -0.352 0.735 |
| Constant | -1.653** 0.648 | -1.013 0.649 | -1.429 0.936 | -2.730** 1.081 |

$N$ 245 245 171 171

-2LL 321.518 311.27 224.264 197.768

pseudo $R^2$ 0.005 0.037 0.031 0.059

*Note: *$P < 0.10$, **$P < 0.05$. 

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women and men. This suggests that a certain level of literacy is required to fully utilize online shopping, even in a situation where the use of smartphones and the internet has become widespread.\cite{5} There was also a difference by residential area for the increase in online shopping for women, as those living in large cities tended to increase online shopping, compared to those living in medium-sized cities. This indicates that, during the pandemic, the use of online shopping increased in large cities due to the diversification of services.

Next, Table 5 shows the results from a logistic regression analysis on the decrease in kinship support. It shows that there was no relationship between living arrangements, women’s employment status, number of children, and decreased kinship support, except for residential area. The residents of big cities were less likely to experience decreased kinship support than those in medium-sized cities. This result is somewhat at odds with what had been expected, that is, since the pandemic had been more severe in big cities, it was expected that residents of such cities would be more concerned about reducing their contact with others and would therefore be more likely to reduce support exchanges among their kin. This may be due to the fact that the severe pandemic in large cities had made it difficult to use childcare resources outside the household and had forced them to rely more on extended family members.

### 5.3 Increased domestic outsourcing, decreased kinship support, and gendered division of domestic labor

Tables 6 and 7 present the results from multinomial logit models on the changes in wives’ relative share of “meal” and “shopping”. Table 6 is based on the women’s responses, while Table 7 is based on the men’s responses. According to Table 6, when they increased the use of takeaways or delivery meals, wives’ relative share of shopping was less likely to increase than to remain unchanged. This suggests that the use of takeaways or delivery meals by women to some extent replaced their shopping for food. In terms of the resource and time availability factors, wives’ relative share of shopping was more likely to decrease than to remain unchanged if they

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**Table 5** Logistic regression models predicting decrease in kinship support

| Women Decrease in kinship support | Coef. | SE  |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----|
| Living with wives’ or husbands’ parents | −1.321 | 1.067 |
| Wives’ employment status in May 2021 (ref. not employed) | | |
| Regular employment | 0.437 | 0.533 |
| Non-regular employment, self-employed | −0.632 | 0.531 |
| Number of children | −0.126 | 0.294 |
| Residential area (Ref. medium-sized city) | | |
| Big city | −2.004*** | 0.660 |
| Small-sized city | −0.654 | 0.564 |
| Rural area | −1.607 | 1.067 |
| Constant | −0.543 | 0.760 |
| N | 184 |
| -2LL | 140.514*** |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.124 |

Note: ***P < 0.01.
| Women’s response                      | “Meal”                        | “Shopping”                     |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                                      | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased | Increased | SE | Decreased |
| Ref. no change                      | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  | Coef.    | SE  |
| Increase in takeaway or delivery meals | −0.205   | 0.424 | 0.067    | 0.361 | −1.008** | 0.477 | −0.014   | 0.369 |
| Increase in online shopping         | 0.216    | 0.432 | 0.189    | 0.368 | 0.098   | 0.488 | 0.355    | 0.367 |
| Wives’ earnings in 2020             | 0.172    | 0.226 | 0.126    | 0.194 | 0.215   | 0.230 | 0.116    | 0.169 |
| Husbands’ earnings in 2020          | 0.053    | 0.071 | −0.007   | 0.061 | −0.019  | 0.076 | −0.056   | 0.070 |
| Respondents’ junior college or more education | 0.293    | 0.401 | 0.500    | 0.339 | 0.569   | 0.429 | 0.845**  | 0.352 |
| Wives' earnings in 2020             | 0.172    | 0.226 | 0.126    | 0.194 | 0.215   | 0.230 | 0.116    | 0.169 |
| Wives' employment status in May 2021 (Ref. not employed) | 0.101    | 0.932 | 0.799    | 0.755 | −0.621  | 0.991 | −0.800   | 0.730 |
|                                      | 0.452    | 0.507 | 0.379    | 0.424 | −0.328  | 0.575 | −1.163***| 0.464 |
| Husbands' weekly work hour in May 2021 | 0.011    | 0.013 | −0.012   | 0.011 | −0.018  | 0.012 | −0.007   | 0.012 |
| Husbands working from home in May 2021 | −1.372* | 0.663 | −0.222   | 0.436 | −1.336  | 1.169 | 1.314***| 0.504 |
| Number of children                  | 0.137    | 0.260 | −0.091   | 0.226 | 0.041   | 0.275 | −0.143   | 0.237 |
| Youngest child younger than 6 years old | 0.201    | 0.421 | 0.358    | 0.355 | 0.507   | 0.469 | 0.196    | 0.394 |
| Frequencies of wives’ “meal” in Jan 2020 | −0.064**| 0.027 | −0.013   | 0.025 |          |      |          |      |
| Frequencies of wives’ “shopping” in Jan 2020 |          |      |          |      | −0.282*| 0.157 | 0.505****| 0.114 |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “meal” in Jan 2020 | 0.118***| 0.035 | 0.017    | 0.035 |          |      |          |      |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “shopping” in Jan 2020 |          |      |          |      | 1.205***| 0.259 | −0.357   | 0.248 |
| Constant                            | −0.056   | 1.396 | 0.660    | 1.244 | −0.228  | 1.175 | −0.654   | 1.003 |
| N                                  | 245      |      |          |      | 245     |      |          |      |
| -2LL                                | 463.694****|      |          |      | 382.858****|      |          |      |
| pseudo R²                           | 0.112    |      |          |      | 0.265   |      |          |      |

Note: *P < 0.10, **P < 0.05, ***P < 0.01, ****P < 0.001.
were highly educated, while it was less likely to decrease than to remain unchanged when they were employed as non-regular workers. Based on Table 4, which shows that women with a high level of education tend to increase their online shopping, it is speculated that such women used the online shopping system to streamline their shopping behavior during the pandemic, which

TABLE 7  Multinomial logit models predicting changes in wives’ share of domestic work (men’s response)

| Men’s response | “Meal” | | | | “Shopping” | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Increased | Decreased | | Increased | Decreased | | |
| Ref. no change | Coef. | SE | Coef. | SE | Coef. | SE | Coef. | SE |
| Increase in takeaway or delivery meals | -0.383 | 0.534 | 0.078 | 0.453 | 0.572 | 0.492 | 0.845* | 0.437 |
| Increase in online shopping | -0.427 | 0.576 | -0.367 | 0.482 | -0.186 | 0.521 | -0.914* | 0.492 |
| Wives’ earnings in 2020 | -0.180 | 0.245 | -0.182 | 0.210 | -0.515* | 0.279 | -0.277 | 0.206 |
| Husbands’ earnings in 2020 | -0.025 | 0.115 | -0.073 | 0.095 | 0.020 | 0.114 | 0.064 | 0.100 |
| Respondents’ junior college or more education | 0.107 | 0.528 | 0.345 | 0.454 | 0.205 | 0.495 | -0.314 | 0.445 |
| Wives’ employment status in May 2021 (Ref. not employed) | | | | | | | | |
| Regular employment | -0.633 | 1.074 | 0.941 | 0.917 | 0.702 | 1.022 | 1.089 | 0.881 |
| Non-regular employment, self-employed | -0.132 | 0.637 | 0.584 | 0.568 | -0.049 | 0.647 | -0.248 | 0.561 |
| Husbands’ weekly work hour in May 2021 | 0.008 | 0.019 | 0.001 | 0.016 | 0.004 | 0.020 | -0.029* | 0.016 |
| Husbands working from home in May 2021 | 0.296 | 0.839 | 0.548 | 0.714 | 1.030 | 0.818 | 1.621** | 0.732 |
| Number of children | -0.181 | 0.325 | -0.529* | 0.285 | -0.377 | 0.339 | -0.388 | 0.267 |
| Youngest child younger than 6 years old | 0.100 | 0.567 | -0.156 | 0.465 | -0.813 | 0.526 | -0.182 | 0.467 |
| Frequencies of wives’ “meal” in Jan 2020 | -0.059** | 0.029 | 0.002 | 0.026 | -0.139 | 0.164 | 0.467*** | 0.130 |
| Frequencies of wives’ “shopping” in Jan 2020 | | | | | | | | |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “meal” in Jan 2020 | 0.122** | 0.037 | 0.042 | 0.036 | | | | |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “shopping” in Jan 2020 | | | | | | | | |
| Constant | 2.073 | 1.807 | 1.618 | 1.610 | -0.561 | 1.654 | -0.536 | 1.238 |
| N | 171 | 171 | | | | | | |
| -2LL | 312.330*** | 291.402**** | | | | | | |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.130 | 0.189 | | | | | | |

Note: *$P < 0.10$, **$P < 0.05$, ***$P < 0.01$, ****$P < 0.001$. 
led to a decrease in their share of shopping relative to men. In addition, women with a non-regular employment were less likely to decrease their relative share of shopping, probably because they tend to work at the workplace away from home, even during the pandemic. Furthermore, when their husbands worked from home, it was more likely that women decreased their share of shopping than it remaining unchanged.

Next, Table 7 shows the results of the analysis for male respondents. According to this table, both food outsourcing and online shopping did not significantly relate to either an increased or decreased wives’ share of meals and shopping. It seems that the increased use of takeaway or delivery meals is likely to reduce wives’ share of shopping, while the increase in online shopping makes is less likely to decrease wives’ share of shopping. However, these relationships did not reach the conventional boundary of statistical significance ($P < 0.10$). In terms of resource and time availability factors, when men were working from home, wives’ relative share of shopping was more likely to decrease than to remain unchanged.

Furthermore, Table 8 presents the results of the analysis of the changes in wives’ relative share of childcare, based on women’s responses. Men’s responses were not analyzed because the sample size was small ($n = 130$) and there were only 13 cases which decreased in terms of kinship support; thus, it was hardly possible to obtain robust results. The table shows that when the kinship support decreased, wives’ relative share of childcare was more likely to increase that remain unchanged. This indicates that women were responsible for covering reduced kinship support, which increased the ratio of wives taking care of the children. There is no clear relationship between resource and time availability factors and changes in wives’ relative share of childcare.

### Table 8  Multinomial logit models predicting changes in wives’ share of childcare (women’s response)

| Women’s response | “Childcare” |  |  |
|------------------|-------------|---|---|
|                  | Increase    | Coef. | SE  | Decrease  | Coef. | SE  |
| Increase in takeaway or delivery meals | $-0.960^*$ | 0.520 | 0.221 | 0.468 |
| Increase in online shopping | 0.671 | 0.519 | 0.401 | 0.478 |
| Decrease in kinship support | 1.749*** | 0.696 | 0.305 | 0.698 |
| Wives’ earnings in 2020 | $-0.372$ | 0.237 | $-0.365^*$ | 0.213 |
| Husbands’ earnings in 2020 | 0.015 | 0.095 | 0.066 | 0.085 |
| Respondents’ junior college or more education | $-0.925^*$ | 0.487 | $-0.435$ | 0.460 |

| Wives’ employment status in May 2021 (Ref. not employed) |  |  |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Regular employment | 0.160 | 1.101 | 0.329 | 1.032 |
| Non-regular employment, self-employed | $-0.916$ | 0.679 | $-1.011$ | 0.627 |
| Husbands’ weekly work hour in May 2021 | 0.020 | 0.017 | $-0.016$ | 0.015 |
| Husbands working from home in May 2021 | $-0.323$ | 0.788 | 0.266 | 0.680 |
| Number of children | 0.016 | 0.310 | $-0.016$ | 0.296 |
| Frequencies of wives’ “childcare” in Jan 2020 | $-0.079$ | 0.135 | 0.006 | 0.125 |
| Frequencies of husbands’ “childcare” in Jan 2020 | 0.048 | 0.063 | $-0.267^{****}$ | 0.067 |
| Constant | 1.221 | 2.103 | 3.121 | 1.956 |

- $N = 184$
- $-2LL = 309.066^{****}$
- Pseudo $R^2 = 0.197$

*Note: *$P < 0.10$, ***$P < 0.01$, ****$P < 0.001$. 
6 | CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the changes in work and family arrangements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular focus on the changes in domestic help, and examines its impact on the division of domestic labor. The data analysis reveals the following four points.

First, the results showed that approximately 40% of respondents experienced a decrease in wives’ share of housework and childcare (except for men’s response for shopping) during the roughly one-year period after the pandemic, although a large gender gap can still be observed in the absolute frequency of domestic labor.

Second, the findings suggest that resources and time constraints may be related to changes in the use of domestic outsourcing, although the model did not have sufficient explanatory power to draw a firm conclusion on this. Specifically, in terms of food outsourcing, the female respondents tended to increase it when their time was more constrained due to the presence of young children, and when they were better-off because of their husbands’ higher income. In the case of online shopping, the results suggest that information literacy, as represented by a relatively high educational background, may have promoted the use of online shopping by both women and men. In addition, changes in kinship support was not related to the respondents living arrangements, in terms of living with the wives’ or husbands’ parents.

Third, the increase in domestic outsourcing partly equaled the gap between women and men in doing housework. Specifically, the increase in the use of takeaways or delivery meals helped the shift towards a more equal division in shopping between women and men. However, the increase in domestic outsourcing did not equal the gender gap in food-related housework. Considering that the time spent on food-related housework was the longest among all housework chores and that the difference between women and men was significant, it is not possible to conclude that domestic outsourcing reduced the women’s domestic responsibilities and narrowed the gender gap in the division of domestic labor. In addition, the decrease in kinship support increased the relative share of childcare performed by wives.

Finally, women’s resources and men’s time were associated with the changes in wives’ relative share of housework, independent of changes in domestic outsourcing. Specifically, having a relatively high educational background (in women) and working from home (in men) tended to reduce the gender gap in shopping.

Overall, while Japanese women undertake a disproportionately large share of domestic labor, there are some indications that there has been a shift toward an egalitarian division of domestic labor during the roughly one-year period since the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic prompted some lifestyle changes, such as an increase in use of takeaways or delivery meals and an expansion in working from home. Such practices contributed to the shift toward more equal sharing of domestic labor. Further enhancement of such lifestyle changes may play a key role in achieving gender equality in domestic labor. However, it should be noted that those with a relatively high income, education, or occupational status have greater access to such lifestyle changes than those with less access to such resources. For example, our analysis shows that those who increased their use of delivery meals tended to be economically affluent, and those who increased the use of online shopping tended to have relatively high educational background. In addition, one study indicated that those who were able to work from home during the early days of the pandemic tended to be highly educated and have a higher occupational status (Shin & Takenoshita, 2021). Given this evidence, lifestyle changes imposed by the pandemic may exacerbate class disparities in the gender gap in domestic labor, that is, they may narrow the gap among the haves and maintain the gap among the have-nots.

Furthermore, this analysis reveals the fragility of the childcare strategies used by Japanese parents, whose childcare is heavily dependent upon extended family members. The unavailability of kinship support caused by the pandemic did not lead men to be more involved with childcare, rather, it resulted in placing a greater childcare burden on women. Work
arrangements that enable men to share greater parental responsibility will be needed; at the same time, “familialism,” the system which places principal responsibility upon family members for caregiving (Matsuki, 2013), in Japanese society, should be re-examined.

Several limitations to this study that should be noted. First, although the data were able to show changes between different points in time, the sample size was small, which increased the possibility of measurement error. In addition, we were unable to obtain a large enough sample size to analyze men’s responses to the decrease in kinship support. Hence, the findings of this study must be re-examined using different data with larger sample sizes. Second, this study analyzed only changes in the use of domestic outsourcing based on the subjective responses of the respondents (e.g., “increased” or “decreased”), and it did not fully grasp which type and amount of outsourcing was used and to what extent their use had increased or decreased during the pandemic. Thus, a more accurate understanding of trends in the outsourcing of housework and childcare under the pandemic is necessary. Third, although it was speculated that the increase in demand for domestic work leads to an increase in the use of visiting housekeepers and babysitters, this study was based on a limited sample of respondents and it did not sufficiently analyze who actually used such services. Finally, since only a few women were working from home, we were unable to examine the relationship between women’s work arrangements and changes in the division of domestic labor. One study suggests that when both wives and husbands work from home, both women’s and men’s domestic labor increase, thus, the gender gap does not decrease in these circumstances (Dunatchik et al., 2021). Further research is necessary on this point.

Despite these limitations, the analysis in this study highlights the relationship between changes in domestic help and changes in the gender gap in domestic labor. It also illustrates the possibilities of widening class disparities in the gender gap, and the fact that traditional childcare strategies were untenable during the pandemic. Whether and how the pandemic has an impact on family and gender relations is an urgent issue that must be examined in future research.

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ENDNOTES

1 However, according to the National Survey on Social Security and People’s Life, approximately 80% of respondents in the highest income decile, and 63% in the lowest income decile answered that they could rely on their “family and relatives” for “taking care of and nursing their children” (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2019). This shows that there are differences in the availability of kinship support across income strata.

2 This includes pre-prepared foods sold in stores or in home deliveries. However, food and beverages served by restaurants, regardless of whether they are home delivered or takeaways, are not classified in this category. Instead, they are classified as “eating out.”

3 If respondents (and their spouses) do each housework task and childcare less than once a week, we gave this a value of 0.001, to ensure there was a positive value, so that we were able to compute the relative share of meals, shopping, and childcare performed by wives. A similar procedure was used by Craig and Baxter (2016), although they computed women’s relative share of housework based on the amount of time spent, but not on the frequency of the household chores undertaken.

4 There were only 10 (4.1%) female respondents who were self-employed, with seven (4.1%) male respondents whose wives had this status. Thus, these cases were integrated into the “non-regular” category. In addition, since only 20 (8.2%) female respondents worked from home in May 2021, and 13 (7.6%) male respondents had wives who worked from home, this study only used the husbands working from home as an independent variable. The reason for such focus in May 2021 was that those who worked from home at that time were assumed to have worked from home since the early stages of the pandemic. The correlation coefficients between the male respondents’ working from home in May 2021, and their working from home in May, November 2020, and January 2021 were 0.523, 0.623, and 0.758 (all significant at the 1% level), respectively.

5 According to the 2020 Telecommunications Usage Trends Survey, 86.8% of the households owned a smartphone, while the percentage of internet users exceeded 90% in the 13–59 year-old age group (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021c).
According to research conducted between May and June in 2020, employees in food service and welfare service businesses, where women in non-regular employment are likely to work, are least likely to work from home among workers in various industries (The Japan Institute of Labour Policy and Training, 2021).

According to the 2016 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities, the average time per week spent on “food management” was 1 h and 28 min for women and 12 min for men, while the time spent on “shopping” was 30 min for women and 17 min for men (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2017).

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