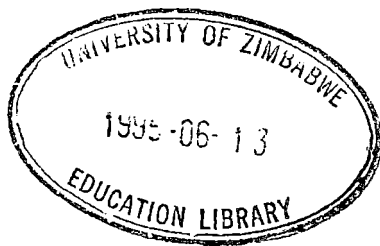


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# Young People's Attitudes Towards Household Work: an Analysis By Age And Its Implications On Home Economics Curriculum At Secondary Level

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper presents evidence obtained from a survey of 182 high school students. The evidence shows that, younger students in age range of 14 - 16 years are more positive than the other year cohorts towards household work and towards the teaching of Home Economics in schools.*

*Results also show that all respondents of both sexes have a lot of interest in cooking and baking because they said they use the end products immediately after.*

*Home Economics was ranked fourth in order of importance behind Maths, Science and English by all age groups.*

*There is also evidence that after exposure to Home Economics courses, youths are more positive towards household chores.*

## **Background**

Household work taken in its widest meaning is all the work that is carried out in order to satisfy the need of household members. It is gaining attention because of the increasing interest in the material economy of society as a whole. However, research in this area is given low priority and there is limited knowledge on the distribution of resources such as time and energy among household members.

Many sociologists see the school as an agent of perpetuating cultural wishes and the given recipes for behaviour. In this way, values and norms of society are being *indoctrinated* along gender lines. Therefore, "sexual division of labour is supported and justified by a belief and value system which states that gender roles are normal, natural, right and proper" (Haralambos and Heald 1980 p.373).

Gender issues were addressed on various aspects such as teacher attitudes (Delamont 1980) women in higher levels of administration and professional structures (Dorsey, Gaidzanwa and Mupawaenda 1989). But not much has been done on the attitudes of youth of Secondary School going age in Zimbabwe. The objectives of this study were to study the participation of youth in household production and their attitude towards tasks traditionally and culturally viewed as women's chores at home.

According to (Dakley in Haralambos and Heald 1980), culture determines gender roles. As a result the decision on who should do what chores at home is determined by people.

A clear understanding of the attitudes towards household chores will contribute greatly to the planning of a curriculum in home economics at secondary level.

The results of this study should be helpful to teachers of home economics in teaching manipulative skills to all students and encouraging participation of males in household chores because of the changes in family structure today.

## Methodology

In order to determine attitudes of young people towards household work, a few selected schools were used. The design of this study is descriptive, evaluative and comparative in nature.

Six secondary schools covering the following Education regions were sampled: Midlands, Harare, Mashonaland East and Masvingo regions. Of the six schools, four were former Group A schools and two former Group B schools. In the six schools, only 240 students were randomly selected. This means that each school received 40 questionnaires.

## Instrumentation

Questionnaires with self addressed and stamped envelopes were posted to each participant. Out of the 240 sent out, only 181 (75.4%) were returned. Some of the questionnaires were followed up by an interview of selected responses.

The use of both questionnaires and interview schedules usually contain a standardized set of questions designed to provide quantitative data. Using the same question in several surveys also permits comparison between samples and thus wider generalization from the data than is possible if each study asks slightly different questions.

Caldwell (1988) supports this approach because of his study where he compared 15 surveys of family planning in tropical Africa and found it to be effective.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
Frequency distribution of respondents by sex and age.

Ages	Sex				
	Male		Female		Total
	F	%	F	%	F
14 - 16 years	51	50.1	53	67.1	104
17 - 18 years	42	47.2	23	29.1	65
Over 19 years	9	8.8	3	3.8	12
	102	100	79	100	181

N. R. = 1N. R. refers to non-respondent.

**Table 2**  
**How many people live permanently in your household?**

Number of people	Ages						
	14-16yrs		17-18yrs		Over 19yrs		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
1	2	1.9	1	1.6	0	0	3
2	4	3.1	4	6.3	1	7.7	9
3	7	6.7	6	9.4	1	7.7	14
4	10	9.6	10	15.6	6	46.2	26
5	3	34.6	25	39.1	1	7.7	62
6	45	43.3	18	28.1	4	30.8	67
Total	104	100	64	100	13	100	181

N.R. = 1

Tables 1 - 3 give background information on the respondents involved in the study. According to table 1, more females in the 14 - 16 years age group participated in the study (67.1% females as opposed to 50% for males)

In table 2, there are more people in the 14 -16 years age group than in other age groups. For 6 or more people in a family, the 14 - 16 years age groups comprise 43.3% as compared to 28.1% of the 17 - 18 and 30.8% of the over 19 years age groups respectively. The data in the table suggests that the youngest respondents came from larger households while the oldest ones came from the smallest households.

Table 3 suggests that there are more brothers and sisters in the over 19 years age groups than other age groups. What this may mean is that older respondents come from large families as has been the trend in most traditional African families. It is interesting to note that the older respondents came from larger families but lived in households of fewer members.

**Table 3**  
**How many brothers and sisters do you have?**

Number of brothers and sisters	Ages						Total F
	14-16yrs		17-18yrs		Over 19yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	3	2.9	3	4.8	1	7.7	7
2	4	3.9	4	6.4	1	7.7	9
3	11	10.7	6	9.5	1	7.7	18
4	30	29.1	17	27.0	2	15.4	49
5	24	23.3	11	17.5	3	23.1	38
6	31	30.1	22	35.0	5	38.5	58
Total	103	100	63	100	13	100	179

N.R

**Table 4**  
**Who do you live with?**

	Ages						Total F
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
both parents	83	80.6	35	58.8	5	41.8	123
mother	8	7.8	7	10.8	1	8.3	16
father	2	1.9	10	15.4	1	8.3	13
one of the parents	1	1.0	5	7.7	1	8.3	7
other adult	9	8.7	8	12.3	4	33.3	2
Total	103	100	65	100	12	100	180

N.R. = 2.

Table 4 shows that the majority of the respondents live with both parents in the three age ranges. This is indicative of the strong traditional views held by most Zimbabweans about family. Evidence from a follow-up interview shows that respondents who have only one parent are forced to do household work because the bread winner is at work.

**Table 5**  
**Type of house**

	14-16yrs		Ages 17-18yrs		Over 19 yr		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
detached house	52	56.5	22	40.7	5	45.5	79
semi-detached house	6	6.5	10	18.5	2	18.2	18
family apartment	25	27.6	15	27.8	1	9.1	41
rented family	9	9.8	7	13.0	3	27.3	19
	92	100	54	100	11	100	157

Again majority of the younger age have *better arrangements for accommodation as shown* by the above table.

**Table 6**  
**How many rooms in your house?**

Number of rooms	Ages						Total
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	1	1.0	0	0	0	0	1
2	3	2.9	4	6.3	2	16.7	9
3	6	5.8	3	4.7	0	0	9
4	10	9.7	14	21.9	2	16.7	26
5	12	11.7	9	14.1	3	25.0	24
6	15	14.6	15	23.4	2	16.7	32
7	56	54.4	19	30.0	3	25.0	78
Total	103	100	64	100	12	100	179

N.R. = 2.

There are more rooms in young age group families than the older ones. The reason probably is that with more and younger children more rooms are required.

**Table 7**  
**Does your family have a car?**

Ages	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	F						
Yes	46	44.7	21	33.3	5	41.7	72
No	57	55.3	42	66.7	7	58.3	106
Total	103	100	63	100	12	100	179

N.R. = 4



As Table 7 indicates, there is not much difference among the age groups in terms of owning a car and not owning one.

**TABLE 8**  
**How many people work outside the home in paid employment?**

	14-16 yrs		Ages 17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
No one works	9	9.9	5	7.8	1	10.0	15
one works part-time	9	9.9	0	0	0	0	9
one works full-time	30	33.0	25	39.1	3	30.0	58
one of the parents	10	11.0	5	7.8	1	10.0	16
two work full-time	31	34.1	26	40.6	5	50.0	62
other	2	2.2	3	4.7	0	0	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>165</b>

N.R. = 17

Table 8 shows that majority of the parents work full-time outside the home especially when children are at an older age.

Such a trend may mean a lot of things. One is that once children are older, mothers are freer to join the labour market. The implication of the above point is that parents spend less time with their older children.

**Table 9**  
**Time spent a week on activities doing household work.**

Hours Spent	14-16 yrs		Ages 17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		Total F
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
	Less than 1 hour	7	7.5	2	3.6	2	
1 - 2 hours	30	32.3	15	27.3	1	8.3	46
2 - 4 hours	21	22.6	11	20.0	2	16.7	34
4 - 10 hours	14	15.1	14	25.5	4	33.3	32
10- 20 hours	11	11.8	5	9.1	2	16.7	18
More than 20 hours	10	10.8	8	14.6	1	8.3	19
	93	100	55	100	12	100	160

N.R. = 22

Table 9 shows that more 17-18 years old spend more than 20 hours on household work (14.6%) as opposed to 10.8%, of 14- 16 years old and 8.3% of over 19 years old.

Table 10 shows that in all age groups, the majority spend less than 2 hours in sewing and knitting.

It is also interesting to note that majority of the respondents were girls. This suggests that the area of sewing is negatively regarded and is not even being done by girls.

**Table 10**  
**Sewing and knitting**

Hours Spent	AGES						Total
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Less than 1 hour	35	60.0	15	34.9	3	50.0	51
1 - 2 hours	15	27.3	20	46.5	0	0	35
2 - 4 hours	2	3.6	3	7.0	3	50.0	8
4 - 10 hours	4	7.3	4	9.3	0	0	8
10- 20 hours	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	1
More than 20 hours	1	1.8	0	0	0	0	1
Total	55	100	43	100	6	100	104

N.R. = 78

**Table 11**  
**How often do you do laundry?**

Times	Ages						Total
	14-16yrs		17-18yrs		Over19yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Several times	14	13.7	20	32.8	4	30.8	38
couple of times a week	29	28.4	22	36.1	2	15.4	53
couple of times a month	15	14.7	3	4.9	1	7.7	19
every four months	2	2.0	1	1.6	0	0	3
rarely	28	27.5	4	6.6	6	46.2	38
Never	14	13.7	11	18.0	0	0	25
Total	102	100	61	100	13	100	175

N.R. = 6

The trend on this table is that the older ages spend more time in laundry work. The reason for such a trend is probably that they are more practical about life.

On the following activities, clean bathroom, do laundry, wash dishes, shop for food, sew a button, repair a chair, mend jeans, vacuum clean the house, all the three age groups seem to indicate that they spend very little time on these activities. The reasons given were that, these activities were not fun. Another reason was that house keepers do the activities so there was no need for them to be labouring on these activities. A lot of these young people indicate that they would not know how to do them anyway due to lack of experience.

Interestingly enough all the three ages showed a lot of support for cooking and baking. The reason given was that they had done a bit of it at school and they were also interested in the immediate feedback the two activities have. What fascinated the young people is the use of labour saving devices like microwaves, electric mixers and food processors.

**Table 12**  
**Ranking of subjects according to importance in a school.**

Subject	Ages					
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Arts	14	53.3	8	33.3	2	8.3
English	87	61.7	43	30.5	11	7.8
Maths	81	60.9	41	30.8	11	8.3
Home Economics	53	57.6	32	34.8	7	7.6
Sports	16	51.6	11	35.5	4	12.9
Music	8	61.5	2	15.4	3	23.1
Science	77	57.0	46	34.1	12	8.9
Social Studies	36	58.3	19	31.7	6	10.0
Child Development	12	44.4	12	44.4	3	11.1
Shona	38	71.7	13	24.5	2	3.2
Any other	7	63.6	4	36.4	0	0
Craft	8	42.1	9	47.4	2	10.5

From table 12, the first five subjects in importance are English 87 (57.6%), Maths 81 (60.9%), Science 77 (57.0%), Home Economics 53 (57.6%) and Shona 38 (71.7%). This priority is for the 14 - 16 years age range. For the 17 - 18 years age range. Science is number one with 46 (34.1%) followed by English 43 (30.5%), Maths 41 (30.8%), Home Economics 32 (34.8%), Social Studies 19 (31.7%). Over 19 years age range rank Science as number one with 12 (8.9%), as number one in importance followed by Maths 11 (8.3%), English 11 (7.8%), Home Economics 7 (7.6%), Social Studies 6 (10%).

An interesting trend is that all three age groups view Home Economics as one of the most important subjects in a school. The three age groups show that Home Economics is number four on the list.

**Table 13**  
**Prioritize subjects according to how much fun they are:**

Subject	Ages					
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Art	53	55.8	35	36.8	7	7.4
English	46	64.8	22	31.0	3	4.2
Maths	33	61.1	18	33.3	3	5.6
Home Economics	36	61.0	15	25.4	8	13.6
Sports	52	59.8	27	31.0	8	9.2
Music	48	52.7	37	40.7	6	6.6
Science	40	58.0	26	37.7	3	4.3
Social Science	23	57.5	13	32.5	4	10.0
Craft4	41	55.4	28	37.8	5	6.8
Child Development	23	54.8	16	38.1	3	7.1
Shona	27	64.3	11	26.2	4	9.5
Any other subject	12	66.7	3	16.7	3	16.7

Table 13 shows that ranking subjects on how much fun they are is different for the three age groups. For the 14 - 16 years age groups, the ranking is as follows: Art is ranked as first with 53 (55.8%), Sport as second with 52 (59.8%), Music 48 (52.7%), English 46 (64.8%), Craft 41 (55.4%). For the 17 - 18 years age group Music is first with 37 (40.7%), followed by Art 35 (36.8%), Craft 28 (37.8%), Sports 27 (31%) and English 22 (31%). The over 19 years age group ranked the subjects as follows: Home Economics as first with 8 (13.6%) followed by Sports 8 (9.2%), Art 7 (7.4%), Music 6 (6.6%), Craft 5 (6.8%).

This ranking is quite interesting in the sense that as one matures in age, there is more independence in thought and subjects of a practical nature are not considered seriously. One can only assume that the reason is that society has a negative attitude towards practical subjects.

**Table 14**  
**How much more time do you like to have for Home Economics?**

Time	Ages						Total
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
much more time	24	30.0	22	36.1	2	15.4	48
more time	27	33.8	15	24.6	5	38.5	47
no more or no less time	11	13.8	6	9.8	0	0	17
less time	8	10.0	3	4.9	1	7.7	12
much less time	9	11.3	6	9.8	2	15.4	17
don't know	11	1.3	9	14.8	3	23.1	13
	80	100	61	100	13	100	154

As the table above shows, 51 (63.8%) of 14 - 16 years as opposed to 17 - 18 years 37 (60.7%) require more time to do Home Economics, suggesting how important this area is to everyday life.

**Table 15**  
**Has the teaching of Home Economics influenced your participation in household work?**

Participation	Ages						Total F
	14-16 yrs		17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Participate much more	31	34.8	20	35.7	3	25.0	54
Participate more	23	25.8	15	26.8	3	25.0	41
Participate same	29	32.6	18	32.1	5	41.7	52
Participate less	5	5.6	0	0	0	0	5
Participate much less	1	1.1	3	5.4	1	8.3	5
	89	100	56	100	12	100	157

From the above table, 14 - 16 years old 31 (34.8%) and 17 - 18 year old 20 (35.7%) indicated that they participate much more in household work after taking some courses in Home Economics. This is followed by another high percentage by 14 - 16 years 23 (35.8%) and 17 - 18 years is (26.8%) participating more now after the Home Economics teaching.

The question of use of Home Economics information in future is quite encouraging for the people in the area. A total of 84 (50.9%) from the total respondents of 165 in all age groups is indicative of the importance of Home Economics in human development, as opposed to 9 (5.5%) who say its of no use. There are no major difference in response to the above question.

**Table 16**  
**Do you think you will use Home Economics experience in future?**

	14-16 yrs		Ages 17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
	Yes, absolutely	46	48.4	32	55.3	6	50.0
Yes, probably	22	23.2	8	13.8	2	16.7	32
Maybe	20	21.1	10	17.2	2	16.7	32
No, I don't think so	3	3.2	4	6.9	1	8.3	8
No, absolutely not	4	4.2	4	6.9	1	8.3	9
	95	100	58	100	12	100	165

N.R. = 17

To finish up, respondents showed that Home Economics deserves an important place in the curriculum as follows:

**Table 17**  
**Ranking of Home Economics**

Mark	14-16 yrs		Ages 17-18 yrs		Over 19 yrs		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
	1	19	20.7	11	20.8	1	7.7
2	6	6.5	2	3.8	1	7.7	9
3	16	17.4	10	18.9	3	23.1	29
4	14	15.2	9	17.0	5	38.5	28
5	37	40.2	21	39.6	3	33.1	61
	92	100	53	100	13	100	158

N.R. = 24



Out of the total of 158 respondents, 61 (38.6%) of all age groups gave it the highest mark of 5. The highest number of respondents are in the 14 - 16 years age range. The older students especially in the over 19 years range do not seem to think Home Economics is very important. A follow-up interview shows that students in the over 19 years age range believe that the subject is not highly regarded for employment and that those who take this subject, are dull and normally girls who have less interest in more academic subjects.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to find out the participation of youths between the ages of 14 - over 19 years in household work.

The study shows that all age groups participate in household work, but the degree of participation varies according to age groups. The younger the respondents, the more positive they are towards household work. Implications of this study points to the fact that our socialization pattern needs to be revised to avoid grouping activities according to the age groups and sexes of students. As the world changes, Zimbabwe must also change with the times. According to Maier (1969), activities of both sexes have changed at family, community, national and world levels. This then is an indication that our approach to issues of socialization should change.

This study has also shown that students who have been exposed to Home Economics courses have a positive attitude towards household work. Auck et al (1987) has attributed the negative attitude to ignorance, negative teaching as one of the major reasons we have problems with young people today.

## CONCLUSION

This study has shown that a lot of work needs to be done in this area.

First, the socialization pattern should be revamped to give the children correct information about activities each person should perform at home. Second, the curriculum in Home Economics should be made mandatory for all forms and age groups so that it becomes easier for them, to help in household chores and to perceive Home Economics like any other subjects.

Third, a concerted effort by government, schools and teachers should be made to present the issues of household work from a more positive approach instead of a one sided view. The one sided view could confuse the perception of young people have towards household chores, social life and education in general (Bryne, 1979).

Fourth, all teacher's college students should be exposed to aspects of Home Economics so that they spread the importance of the subject to school students. One hopes that within the classroom situation, what pupils will have learnt can be at home by the same pupils/students. But probably more studies need to be carried out in this area.

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