

RESEARCH NOTE: GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES IN SCOTLAND

John MacInnes

In an article in **Scottish Affairs** ('The Myth of the Macho Scotsman', 1998) I suggested that, contrary to received wisdom, there was little evidence that attitudes towards gender relations were more conservative in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain. However there was an important caveat to the argument, because of the nature of the evidence available. Surveys of social attitudes in Britain such as the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS), from which the evidence in that article was taken, are based on samples sizes that enable us to make fairly confident estimates of opinion for Britain as a whole, but which are too small to make more than rather general comparisons of opinion across its different constituent parts. Moreover, such surveys rarely sample opinion north of the Great Glen, because of the disproportionate cost involved in conducting face to face interviews in the highlands and islands, and the low chances of the small number of such interviews having much impact on the overall results.

Since 1999, the fielding of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSAS) in parallel to its British equivalent allows us to overcome these methodological difficulties, although including questions of special relevance to Scotland unfortunately comes at the cost of dropping some of the questions used in the British version. In 2002 the BSAS repeated the questions about family and gender relations that formed the basis for the 1998 analysis. Fortunately, one of the most important questions was also included in the SSAS, so that for the first time we have a statistically robust basis for comparing gender attitudes north and south of the border.

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Respondents were surveyed about their attitudes to the appropriate division of sex roles between men and women by asking to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the core proposition of what has been described as the ‘male breadwinner system’: the norm that men should concentrate on paid employment while women ought to prioritise the domestic sphere of making a home and raising children. Until fairly recently this was a set of ideas that enjoyed widespread popular support. However the rise in women’s employment in Europe, especially over the last four decades, increasing belief in gender equality as an ideal, and the growing conviction that men and women should share both domestic tasks and childcare has dramatically reduced normative support for the male breadwinner system. Even in countries where gender inequality remains entrenched in the labour market, such as Spain or Italy, most adult men and women disagree with the male breadwinner ideal in principle. Table 1 shows the results for 2002 for England and Scotland. They confirm the results of the earlier analysis that gender attitudes are indeed very similar in Scotland and England, with a slightly larger share of men and women in Scotland being gender egalitarian in their outlook.

Table 1
Percentage of men and women agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family’

	Scotland		England	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agree strongly	4	3	5	3
Agree	9	7	15	11
Neither agree nor disagree	17	13	20	16
Disagree	41	33	41	47
Disagree strongly	27	47	18	21
Can’t choose/Not answered	2	3	2	2
Unweighted sample size	706	812	720	927

sources: British Social Attitudes Survey 2002 and Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2002.

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The larger sample also allows us to examine how views on gender relations vary according to different social groups or correlates with other views or characteristics of respondents. It also enables us to separate out the effects of each characteristic. For example older people are more likely to agree with male breadwinner norms, and those with lower educational qualifications are also more likely to do so. Since older people are also more likely to have lower educational qualifications, it is useful to be able to distinguish the effect of these factors by examining them while controlling for others: that is to say, comparing the effect of educational qualifications separately for different age groups. Since the details of the statistical tool used to do this, logistic regression, are of interest only to the specialist, the details of the analysis are confined to the Appendix, and only the conclusions are reported here. Tables 2 to 4 show how views vary by age, sex, religion and educational qualifications. To make the tables clearer, two small changes have been made from the full results. The small number of respondents to each question who could not choose which answer to give, or who refused to answer the question, have not been shown in the tables, while the other five choices of response shown in Table 1 have been reduced to three by combining those who reported 'strong' views with those who simply agreed or disagreed.

National identity (in the sense of whether people think of themselves as Scottish, British or both) has absolutely no effect. Nor do other factors that we might imagine to be important, such as religion, party identification or marital status, play as great a role as we might expect. Although those who identify with the Conservative party or define themselves as religious or are widowed are more likely to agree with the male breadwinner norm, this is almost entirely explained by the fact that these groups contain larger numbers of older people. Men are slightly more likely to agree than women, but the effect is not a very strong one. By far the most important variable is age. Once we take account of this the only other factors that make a substantial difference are educational qualifications and, for women, whether or not they are working, or looking after the home. Those who have experienced higher education are much less likely to agree with the male breadwinner norm, while it is hardly surprising that working women, consistent with their behaviour, are less likely to support it.

The British Social Attitudes survey for 2002 asked a much larger range of questions, and, as in the past, the small sample size in Scotland limits how

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precisely we can measure attitudes. However, on all the main variables considered in the 1998 article, views in Scotland not only continue to be little different from those in England, but also show a similar tendency towards the growth in acceptance of norms of gender equality, comparing them with the results obtained in 1994, the last time this set of questions was asked.

Table 2
Attitudes to 'male breadwinner norm' (as in Table 1), by age and sex

	Men	Women	18-44	45-64	65+	All
Agree	13	10	4	9	32	11
Neither agree nor disagree	17	13	11	17	22	15
Disagree	70	77	84	74	46	74
Unweighted sample size	651	818	651	496	319	1466

sources: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2002.

Table 3
Attitudes to 'male breadwinner norm' (as in Table 1), by highest educational attainment

	Higher Education	Higher grade or equivalent	Ordinary grade or equivalent	CSE or equivalent	None	All
Agree	4	4	9	13	26	12
Neither agree nor disagree	12	13	16	19	18	15
Disagree	85	83	75	68	56	74
Unweighted sample size	432	233	187	208	389	1449

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sources: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2002.

Table 4
Attitudes to ‘male breadwinner norm’ (as in Table 1), by religion

	No religion	Church of Scotland or other Presbyterian	Catholic	All Others	All
Agree	8	15	14	9	12
Neither agree nor disagree	14	18	11	18	15
Disagree	78	67	75	73	74
Unweighted sample size	633	481	180	175	1469

sources: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2002.

One of the most interesting new findings concerns views about the division of work within the home. Only around one in twenty respondents in Scotland, male or female, disagrees with the idea that men should do a larger share of housework and looking after children. When men and women who live as a couple are asked whether they think they currently do their fair share of housework, two thirds of women in Scotland say they do more than their fair share, while a little under one half of all men admit to doing less than they themselves think they should! However respondents report that such a situation rarely results in arguments about the proper sharing of such work, suggesting that, for whatever reason, many men are still able to avoid a ‘fair’ share of housework, and many women are resigned to being able to do little to change this. It seems that although men and women in Scotland (and elsewhere in the UK) agree with the idea of gender equality, they often manage to avoid its implications in their everyday lives.

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APPENDIX

Results for best fitting logistic regression model predicting those who *agree* with, or neither agree or disagree with the male breadwinner norm, compared to those who explicitly disagree with it.

		Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for Exp(B)	
						Lower	Upper
Sex	<i>Male</i>	20.352	1	.000	1.823	1.404	2.367
Age group	<i>Under 50</i>	20.028	2	.000			
	50 to 65	5.012	1	.025	1.477	1.050	2.077
	Over 65	19.936	1	.000	3.092	1.884	5.076
Qualifications	<i>Higher education</i>	16.411	5	.006			
	A level	.019	1	.890	1.031	.669	1.589
	O level	3.243	1	.072	1.495	.965	2.316
	CSE	3.251	1	.071	1.457	.968	2.195
	None	13.524	1	.000	1.946	1.365	2.774
Economic activity	<i>Paid work</i>	26.796	5	.000			
	education	.085	1	.771	1.144	.463	2.827
	unemployed	2.342	1	.126	1.559	.883	2.753
	Perm sick or disabled	8.025	1	.005	1.944	1.227	3.079
	retired	7.396	1	.007	1.890	1.195	2.990
	Keeping house	22.267	1	.000	3.139	1.952	5.048
	Constant	183.44	1	.000	.102		

Reference categories are shown in italics.

Observed	Disagree with MBWN	All others	% Correctly predicted
Disagree with MBWN	937	112	89.3
All others	262	151	36.6

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Overall	74.4
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Nagelkerke R Square = 0.193

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