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Flash Session: Flexible Work & the Gender Division of Childcare in Austria

Marco Santacroce
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Motivation: Flexible work for achieving gender equality

- Since COVID, expansion of flexible work across Europe. Arrangments such as WFH are now structural vs emergency.
- European Commission Gender Equality Strategy names flexible work as a lever for increasing gender equality
- Intuition: more control over when and where one works should enable a more equal sharing of domestic responsibilities

Question: Does flexible work actually deliver equality, or does it intensify it?

Redistribution

Time-availability theory (Coverman 1985)

Flexibility loosens workplace constraints. Men with FWAs take on more domestic work, the share of care performed by women falls, and the division of labor becomes more equal.

Intensification

Intensive-mothering framework (Hays 1996)

Flexibility draws women further into high-investment, child-centered care. The total amount of care grows, but the gendered division does not change or worsens.

Data & Methods: Austrian Time Use Survey 2021/22

4,236

Employed adults, aged 20–
59 years

1,334

Dual-earner couples

2

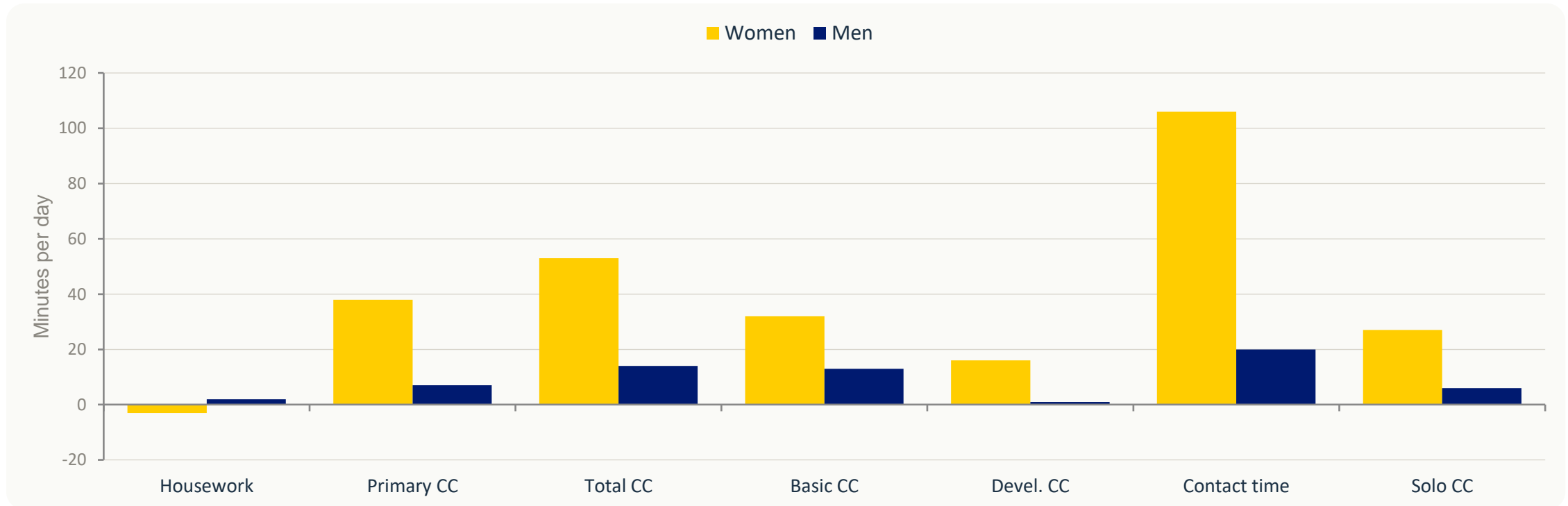
FWAs: Work from Home
(WFH) and Schedule
Control (SC)

8

Outcomes: Housework & 7
Childcare

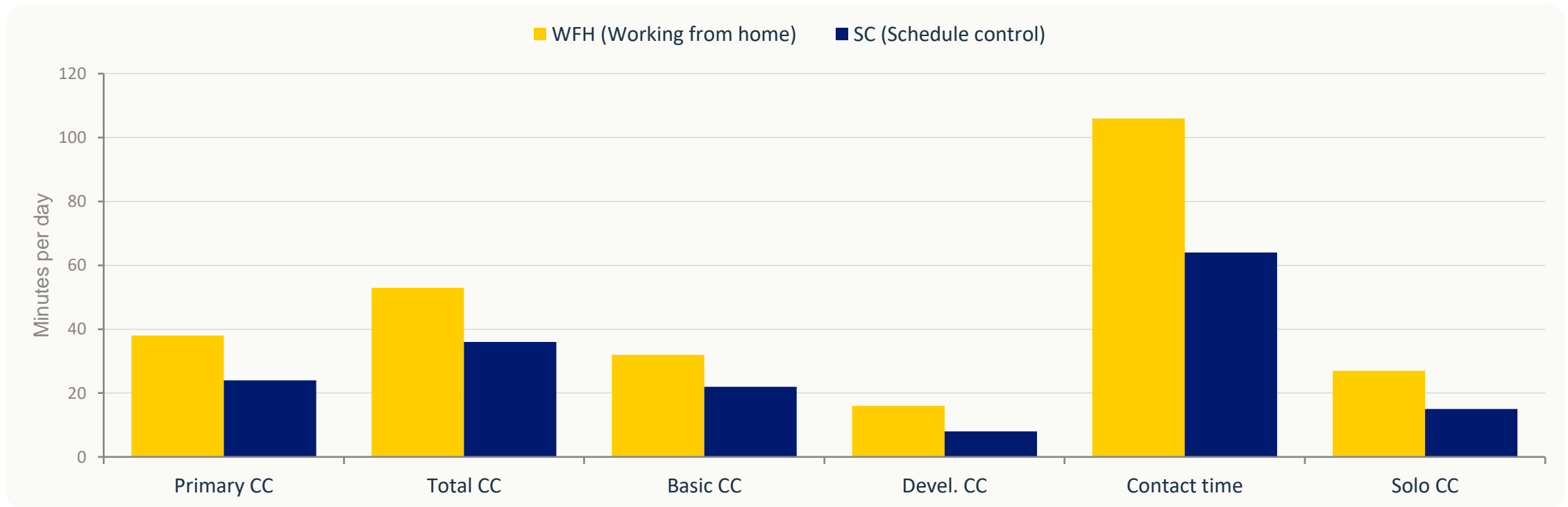
- Time diary data: OLS by gender, couple-fixed effects, and Augmented Inverse Probability Weighting (AIPW); by weekday and weekend separately, and pooled
- Couple-level analysis: female share of care and total minutes

Finding 1: Childcare moves, housework does not



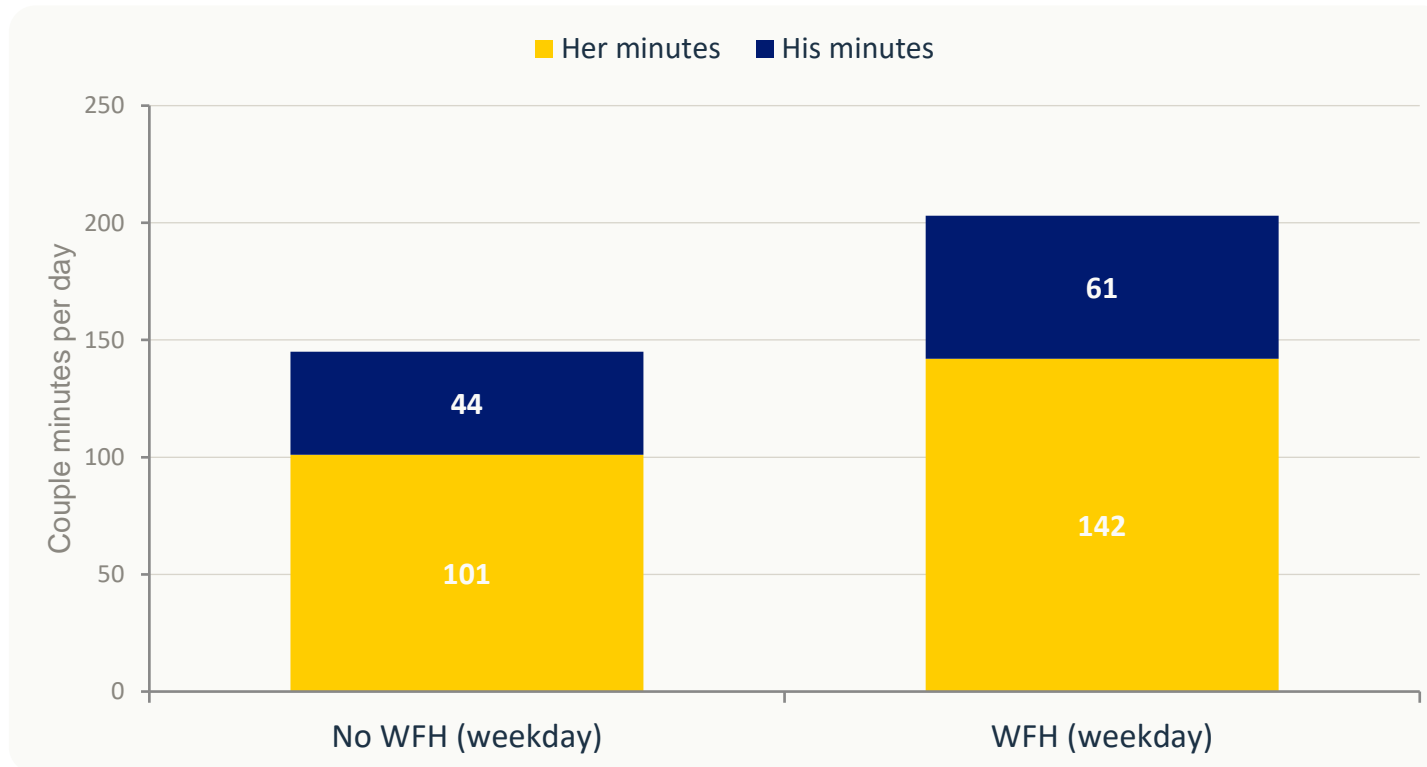
Effect of WFH on minutes per day, by gender and activity, pooled sample

Finding 2: WFH affects care more than SC



Effect on women's minutes per day, by FWA and activity, pooled sample

Finding 3: Total care grows, but the share does not change



Primary childcare on a weekday

Total childcare grows from

145 → 203 min

Her share stays at roughly

70 / 30

Both partners gain time in proportion to their baseline involvement

Conclusion: Flexibility expands care, it does not equalize it

- FWAs do not affect housework, but increase childcare, especially among women.
- WFH effects are larger than SC.
- Inequality is concentrated on weekdays, weekends are more equal regardless of FWA.
- The 70/30 gender division is preserved because both partners gain time in equal proportion.