

PRESS RELEASE

IFHE SYMPOSIUM 2008

“Challenges for Home Economics – Equality of Women and Men in Responsibility for Family and Housework”

On Saturday, 9th February 2008 IFHE invited members to an International Symposium in Heidelberg Germany, the theme: **“Challenges for Home Economics- Equality of Women and Men in Responsibility for Family and Housework”**.

The symposium was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

85 participants listened to different presentations from experts from all over the world. In choosing this theme for the Symposium the IFHE President Lilha LEE, Ph.D., pointed out the gender aspects of family and housework, the international characteristics as well as the opportunities to reach a more gender equality.

“Gender aspects - division of labour in different societies” was the theme Mary ANDREWS from Michigan State University Extension, USA, presented. She focused the process of changing of the division of the labour in time. While women spend more time in the workplace men step in to help out, but women still do the majority (85-95%) of the housework even when both male and female work outside the home. One explanation has to do with the *psychological difference* between men and women. Men do not pay attention to the dust on the flour and often revert to the “specialization principle” each should do what they do best. Therefore men should do the outside work as house repairs and women should do the inside work as cleaning. However, the rules are changing. The “New men” helps out in the kitchen and caring for the children beyond playing with them. In very traditional societies like Greece, Austria or the Czech Republic men refuse to participate on the housework. The *“macho” image* of the male is one of the barriers to change. Today, the most common goal is to become a *partnership of equals* in which the housework is felt to be divided fairly equally.

A presentation concerning **“Housework and the role cliché – chances for a change”** was given by Prof. Dr. Barbara METHFESSEL and Gerti SCHMIDT, University of Education Heidelberg, Germany.

They pointed out the obvious change in the division of labour. One of the main statements was that women do less housework but they do not neglect their role as mother and women but the one as housewife. On the other hand men are leaving the traditional role of the breadwinner; most of them do not yet accept the role of an egalitarian partner. The number of men with an egalitarian concept of gender roles is



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increasing which means a higher participation on housework. The underlying question to be raised is the one of how to design one's individual and familial way of life. Role clichés are softening. The need of development as well as social acceptance and tolerance of new role models and additional a need of common public systems of support on the one hand and adequate provision of (domestic) services on the other is obvious.

On **“The aspect of equality in home economics education”** focused by Dr. Gerda CASIMIR from the Department of Sociology of Consumers and Households, Wageningen University, Netherlands. She explained the changing of home economics education from the first establishment in the 19th century which addressed girls and women until today. Nowadays, competencies to be achieved are still part of the curriculum; however, schools are free to decide how the content is offered: either in a separate subject, or as part of economics, biology, civics and other subjects. The home economics education is seen as not interesting by most of the girls and boys. Girls are more self-confident and see choices and opportunities and do not want to be addressed as girls. Whenever they see gender differences, they regard them as a result of individual choices, made of one's own free will. Boys are hard to motivate to participate in the subject.

The challenge of Home Economics is to show that it is dealing with important issues as world problems, to make it more attractive by taking part in much watched television programmes, and, last but not least, to involve more men.

“Ideas and chances to promote equality of women and men in responsibility for family and housework” were presented by Prof. Dr. Sidiga WASHI, Dean of School of Family Sciences, Ahfad University for Women, Sudan.

A significant aspect of partnership and a central element to social integration in society in general, and particularly in families, is the dimension of gender. The prescription of rigid gender roles, rights and responsibilities in families is rooted in cultural assumptions and widely accepted social norms, and it is affected by social and economic variables. Being aware of common general trends, gender roles and their changes must be interpreted in the social and cultural contexts in which they evolve.

How to improve gender equality in families to ensure a harmonious working partnership is of most importance. Inequality between women and men limits the potential of individuals, families, communities and nations.

The role of males in families needs to develop new dimensions if they are to contribute significantly to make more equitable the role of women, and improve in a sustainable way the stability of family life. Achieving true partnership between men and women in family life requires an equal sharing of rights and responsibilities within the family and in public life.

“Challenges for home economics towards realisation of Work-Life Balance of women and men” were pointed out by Prof. Dr. Setsu ITO, Dean of Graduate School of Human Sciences, Showa Women's University, Tokyo, Japan. Her presentation on the Concept of Work-Life Balance (WLB). WLB which is defined as “balance of work and private life” or more accurately “paid – unpaid work and other human activities balance”. The WLB study put the question in focus that paid work and family life balance is destroyed by overly extensive paid work. Home economics studies of Time Use, Gender Equity, Family in Development and Family in Transition are important inputs of the WLB concept and studies.

To conclude the Symposium Geraldene B. HODELIN, Ph.D., Dean of Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, University of Technology, Jamaica, and IFHE President Elect developed “**Demands from societies and tasks for home economic associations**” as consequence of the mentioned aspects of the “Challenges for Home Economics - Equality of Women and Men in Responsibility for Family and Housework”.

She claimed for more participation of home economists and home economics associations to reach gender equality in Family and Housework. As one opportunity to reach this aim she mentioned the stronger cooperation of IFHE with other NGO's, the government departments and the private sector regarding this challenge. The support of national professional groups trying to achieve gender equality with scientifically founded material and studies as well as practical help is a starting point. To maintain and strengthen home economics education in school and at university is an important task for home economics associations and experts from all over the worlds. Developing curriculum units with focus of gender equity in IFHE Programme Committee is seen as a first step to support the change of the work division between women and men. As one of the concrete results of the Symposium a discussion in IFHE Programme Committee Gender and Family in Development was initiated. The result is a workshop at IFHE Congress focusing on this theme.