

Unpaid Care Work In India: Revisiting Through The Gender Lens

RosalinGeetha Ingersal and Mahin Sharif

Ph.D. Scholar, UAS, Bengaluru, India

Corresponding Author: rosalingeetha@gmail.com

Manuscript No: KN-V1-01/023

Abstract

Unpaid domestic and care work is a universal issue, yet it is left unnoticed. Unpaid work provides services such as household chores including cooking, fetching water, firewood collection and care services like child and elderly care (Elson, 2000). It assures the family well-being and later the spread effect i.e., nation's wealth. Though it aids economic activity, it has not been recognized as a remunerated work as per the consideration of National Accounts Statistics and not included in the calculation of GDP. Hence unpaid work can also be referred to as unrecognized work. The major shareholders of such activities are taken care of by women; so it has been perceived as women's work. For instance, in India, where only 22 per cent of women participate in the labour force, and 70 per cent of them work informally in agriculture as an unskilled farm labour with no remuneration and insignificant participation in productive decisions (Fletcher *et al.*, 2017). This low participation of labour force is largely due to their involvement in unpaid domestic work. (Mehrotra *et al.*, 2014). This explicit worsening scenario of women's activity is clubbed into underestimated and less recognized informal works. The predominance of women in unpaid work is majorly mainstreamed through deep-rooted gender norms built by informal courts i.e., patriarchal societies. Such informal rules interfere in the system by doing gendered classification of work and wages. Charmes (2019) depicted that the share of women being involved in unpaid care work in India is 90.7 per cent. This disproportionate participation by women in domestic and care work shortens their life choices, excluding them from participating in economic activity, skill development, girl children's education and piled up as a 'double burden' throughout their lifetime persistently. This also curbs their intra-household bargaining role in the family and less involvement in politics. (Allendorf, 2012). Thus, to recognize the importance of women and to address these severe conditions of developing countries like India, UN has considered unpaid work under goal number 5 (gender equality) as a target to be attained in 2030.

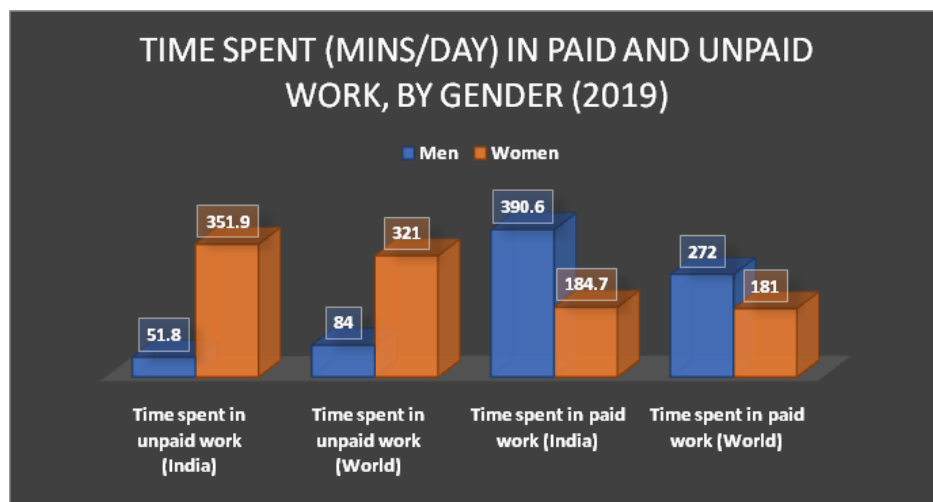
Gender dimension in participation of unpaid work: The 1995 Human Development Report documented that women in developing countries spent more than half (53 per cent) of working hours either in the livelihood sector, or in unpaid domestic activities. Time use data (Table.1) of NSO documented the gendered division of labour participation in India. It reflects the gender gap in paid and unpaid work differs across gender. Indian men dominated in paid employment activities (56.1 per cent in rural and 59.8 per cent in urban) whereas the marginalised role of women is reported in the same. On the other hand, a feminised role can be seen in unpaid domestic activities (82.1 per cent in rural and 79.2 per cent in urban) where men's participation is meagre.

Table.1: Percent participation in different activities in a day, by gender.

Description of the activity	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Employment and related activities	56.1	19.2	59.8	16.7
Production of goods for own final use	19.1	25	3.4	8.3
Unpaid domestic services for household members	27.7	82.1	22.6	79.2
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	14.4	28.2	13.2	26.3
Unpaid volunteer and other unpaid work	2.8	2	2.5	2.2
Learning	24.1	19.4	23.3	20.7
Socializing, communication, and religious practice	91.7	91.2	90.6	91.4
Culture, leisure and sports practices	87	82.2	92.1	92.7

Source: NSS Report: Time Use in India- 2019 (January – December 2019)

Globally, men contribute less than 20 per cent in total unpaid work. For developing countries like India, it is extreme condition i.e., less than 10 per cent (Charmes, 2019). The recent TUS data collected by OECD (Fig.1) depicts that Indian women dedicate 6.88 times more than the counterpart involved in unpaid care work. When considering the world average (75 countries), women spending time in unpaid work is 3.2 times more than men. On the other end, for paid work, it is masculinized i.e., men devote more time (2.11 times) when compared with women. The comparison between world and India data explains that, male spends less time on unpaid work when compared with world and vice versa in case of paid work. The intensification of women in unpaid work is noticed more than world average and it is opposite in case of paid work. The increase in every minute spending in unpaid work, reduces the opportunity of spending one minute less in paid work for women. This clearly gives insights of Indian scenario that men are identified for their paid work and women stamped to address the needs of care and domestic work.



Data Source: <https://stats.oecd.org/>

Fig.1: Time spent (minutes/day) in paid and unpaid work in India and World, by gender.

Implications of unpaid domestic and care work on Indian women

The disproportionate burden of unpaid work has serious drawbacks and affects women in different ways. It is complex to sensitize all the ill facets that woman masks in day-to-day life. Although women involved in unpaid works whole heartedly, the extra cost of providing unpaid services adversely affects mental and physical health; Poor infrastructure facilities in rural areas in the arenas like road, water and energy deepens the women's burden and expands the time spent on it. It decreases their financial freedom and lessens the say over intrahousehold decisions; increases the probability of pushing women into poverty and sickness in later part of life due to their involvement in drudgery of unremitted services at earlier and middle stage of their life. They are unsecured without having social recognition, respect and majorly property rights (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016); Most of women involved were of rural background and low-income strata, they are prone to intra household violence, and it is also influenced by their community people skilled with gender norms. (Esplen, 2009). Women involved in remunerated care works like nurses and people doing household chores in urban areas were also addressed with job insecurity. (Langer, 2015)

Policy Suggestions

Given the vast background of prevailing status of gendered participation of labour in unpaid work in India, this policy brief suggests the macroeconomic interventions through three R approach drawn from Elson, (2017). The three Rs can be expanded as Reward, Recognition and Redistribution. For Indian context, women engagement in unpaid work is due to three major factors such as gender norms, lack of market for unpaid work (life choices) and lack of career options.

Recognition and Reward: According to a 2022 SBI report, women on average spend approximately more than 7 hours a day on household tasks and the imputed value of unpaid and care work is valued to 7.5% of GDP. Policy makers may attempt for time use budgeting through gender lens to recognise women and her

time sacrificed for domestic and care work and analyse its opportunity cost to value in economic terms. Then she can be rewarded by monetizing like giving incentives, pensions, or care giver allowance. Efforts should also be taken to make awareness on importance of skill building, thereby improving the educational status. Nutritional status of care givers also needs to be given importance so that community wellbeing and nation's productivity can be assured.

Reduction: Work burden can be reduced through better provision of infrastructures like road connectivity, water pipes and provisioning of energy saving stoves especially to rural areas to lessen the time sacrificed on collecting source for fuel wood.

Redistribution: For formal jobs, paid paternal leave is a better option to redistribute the childcare work to father and helps solving the motherhood penalty. For developing countries like India, so as to motivate men to take part in parental roles, childcare and family allowance can be given to the primary care givers not necessarily that is mothers.

Reference

Allendorf, K. (2012). *Women's agency and the quality of family relationships in India. Population research and policy review*, 31, 187-206.

Charmes, J. (2019). *The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market. An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys. International Labour Office–Geneva: ILO.*

Elson, D. (Ed.). (2000). *Progress of the World's Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report. United Nations Development Fund for Women.*

Elson, D. (2017, May). *Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work: How to close the gender gap. In New Labor Forum (Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 52-61). Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.*

Esplen, E., & Brighton Institute of Development Studies. (2009). *Gender and care: overview report. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.*

Ellingrud, K., Madgavkar, A., & Manyika, J. (2016). *The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in the United States. McKinsey Global Institute.*

Fletcher, E., Pande, R., & Moore, C. M. T. (2017). *Women and work in India: Descriptive evidence and a review of potential policies.*

Langer, A., Meleis, A., Knaul, F. M., Atun, R., Aran, M., Arreola-Ornelas, H., ... & Frenk, J. (2015). *Women and health: the key for sustainable development. The Lancet*, 386(9999), 1165-1210.

UNDP. *Human Development Report 1995: Gender and human development. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1995/>*