

Invisibility of Women's Work in Care Economy

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Abstract—*Women around the world are engaged in care economy but their work is not even given any recognition or calculated as a contributing factor in economy. The current paper will try to analyze falling rate of women's participation in labour force as well as invisibility of unpaid work in statistical sources. In this paper I'll be using NSSO data, ILO Report on Care Economy and other secondary sources.*

Keynotes: *Unpaid work, Care economy, marginalization of women.*

Introduction

It is irony that in the 21st century we are still struggling with the stereotypes like inferiority and superiority complex. Despite our all the social as well as intellectual development, we still see woman inferior to men. In a world where we all are talking about equality, eradication of discrimination and its various practices, women are still struggling to have access to decent job, decent wage and most importantly equal treatment as compare to men. Although the recent decades witness rise of women's voices as well as significant advancement in their literacy but still challenging for the women to get recognition of their hard unpaid work which they did within the four walls of house. Women across the globe have been subject to inferior treatment despite the fact that they do more work than men. From centuries, women are engaged in household chores for which they have been never given any recognition or payment. Our society simply assumes that women are born to do household chores and it is their ideal duty. Such thinking has been also got support from ancient text where women are portrayed as guardian of household and disciplined and obeying wives or sisters or mothers. Due to such prejudices and presupposed notion towards women, explain very well the decline trend of women's participation in labour force.

What Constitute Unpaid Work?

What is unpaid work? It is a question which everybody especially men needs to understand in the context of women and their contribution within the economy. 'Unpaid' means for no pay, 'Care' means activity serves people and their well-being. Unpaid work simply constitutes all the non-remunerated activities which women do. This includes all household chores which supposed to be done by women or which is assumed to be done by women only. Its allocation depends upon many factors such as type of family, age, social class, number of children and old members of family. [Antonopoulos & Hirway, 2010] In order to give recognition of women's work, feminist economists have demanded that unpaid care work to be counted in statistics as well as "accounted for" in the representation of economy and also "taken into account" in policy making. [Elson, 2000]

Methods for Calculating Unpaid Work

Time Use Surveys (TUS) which is also known as time budget surveys is widely used to calculate unpaid work. TUS provide information about an individual's daily or weekly activity in a given time period. This provides information about time spent on different specific activities. According to Iris Niemi, a Finnish TUS expert, TUS have originated during 1900s in the studies of family budget of industrial workers. The accounting method, used for research on living conditions among working class families in England and France at the end of the nineteenth century, developed into a time budget or time use research tradition in which people's behaviour is measured in terms of their use of time in hours and minutes. In 1970s, with the emerging gender inequality and growing consensus for women's unpaid work, TUS became major tool to assess value of unpaid work.

One of the common uses of TUS particularly in developing countries is to know about what kind of work men and women do as well as working pattern of men and women. TUS also gives clear information about who perform unpaid work, when and how they do so as well as what other things an individual have to do at the same time. In India, department of statistics in 1998 launched TUS in six states (Haryana, M.P, Gujarat, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya) on pilot project. The survey recorded information about seasonality of work pattern over a period of one year i.e from July 1998 to June 1999. The Ministry of

Statistics and Programme Implementation has started TUS in 2019 and will be canvassed for the first time for the period January to December 2019.

Women’s Participation in Labour Force: Global Trends

Although with the advent of globalization and proliferation of Multi-national companies in metropolitan cities, a considerable number of women entered into employment with equal wages, shattering traditional participation of labour market. But due to pressure to manage both household work and office work, we see decline of women’s participation in labour force. The recent report of the ILO on *Care Work and Care Jobs: The Future of Decent Work (2018)* emphasize that care work, both paid and unpaid is crucial to the future of decent work, particularly in countries that experience low labour market participation of women and women’s secondary status in the labour markets. Further the report mentioned that unpaid work is the major barrier which prevents women to join actively in labour force. The data ILOSTAT 2015 of female labour force participation survey shows that only 48.5 percent women are in labour market as compare to 75.0 percent men. Apart from this women’s global labour force participation is also declining which is currently reached to 26.5 percent. The gaps are more visible in Arab states, Northern Africa and Southern Asia, where it exceeds to 50 percent and account for the lowest level of female labour force participation rates which is less than 30 percent. Please see below figure1 to understand the pattern of female labour force participation of women across the world.

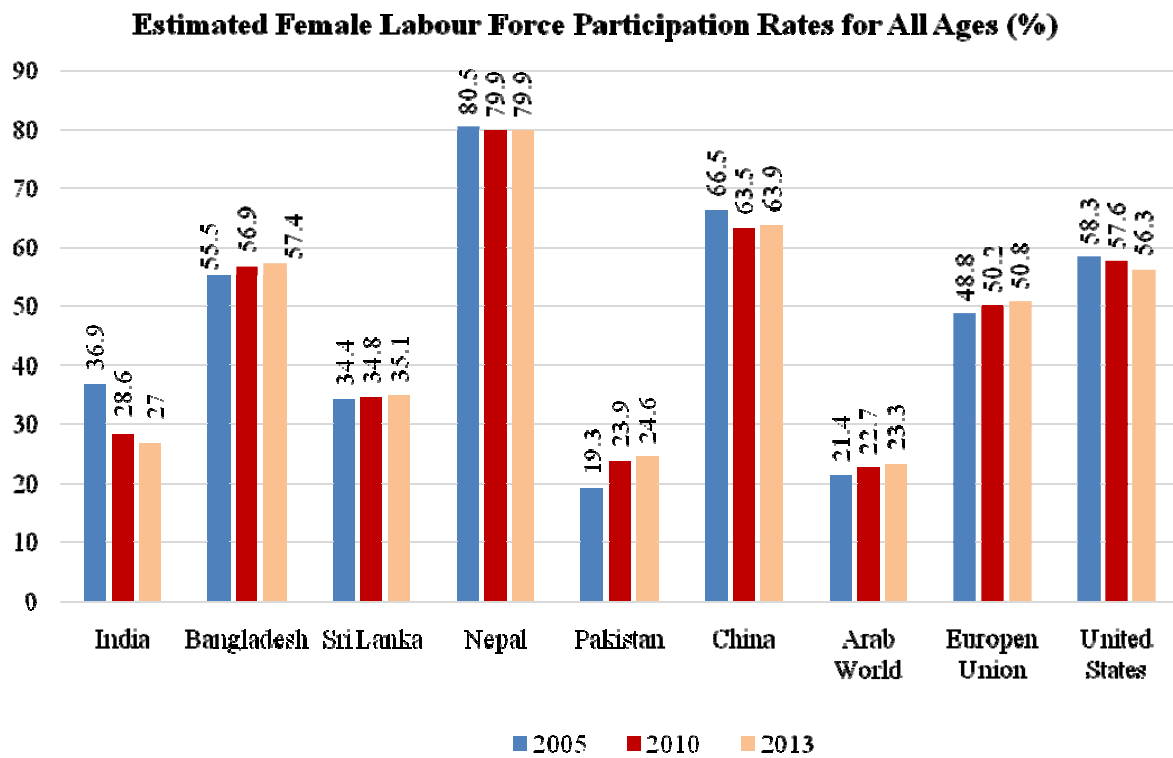


Figure 1.

Source: ILOSTAT 2015

Recognising Unpaid Work

In 2015 United Nations and representatives of various agencies set fourth seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the better future of the world. One of the SDGs i.e SDG no 5 is Gender Equality. Gender equality here envisages providing better and inclusive environment for women where they can get access to decent work. Any attempt in this direction would be incomplete without recognising care and domestic work, done mostly by women and public provisioning of care services. To estimate unpaid work, Time Used Surveys are globally used to understand percentage of time spent on doing unpaid care and domestic work by sex, age group and location. So based on this time used surveys, as per ILO Report, globally women do three quarter of the unpaid care work. In the case of country like India where women are supposed to do all domestic works, there

share to unpaid work is very high. Out of 24 hours, women on average spent their 76.2 percent time either on care work or domestic work. It is estimated that women on an average engaged in care work 3.2 times more time than men. In 2018 due to pressure to do care work or domestic work, around 606 million women of working age declared themselves to be unavailable for employment or not aspiring to work due to care work. While only 41 million men are inactive due to the same reason. Apart from this the report further highlighted that men enjoy more leisure time in compare to women. Please see below in the Figure2 to understand patterns of declining trend of women in labour market.

Declining Female Labour Force Participation: India (NSSO)

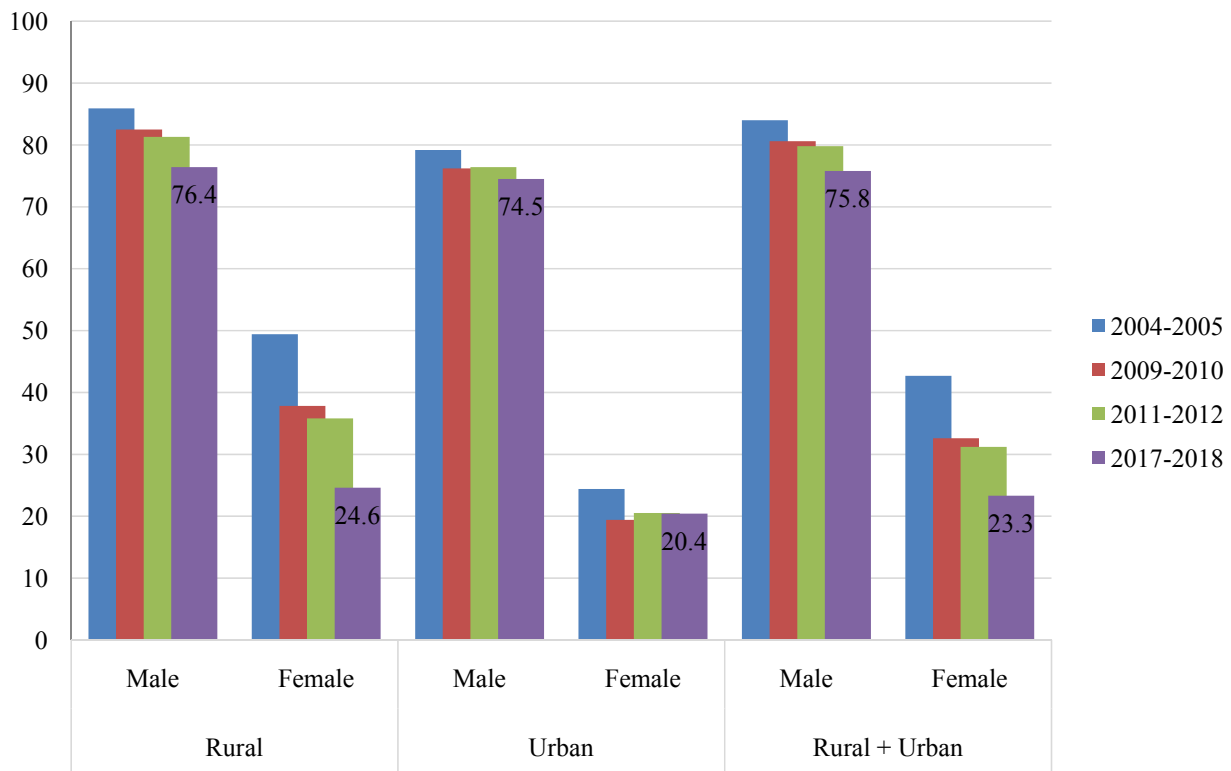


Figure 2.

Falling participation of women in labour force: Reasons

In the context of developing countries like India, female labour force participation rates are declining. One of the primary reasons of low participation of women in labour force is non recognition of women centric works such as household chores i.e cooking, collection of fuel and fodder, taking care of children old members of family. It has been found that due to various social and family constraints forced women to do such activities at their prime working age. Early renouncement of women from labour force (mostly in urban areas) is seen primarily due to lack of cooperation from family as well as society. Apart from this lack of comprehensive policy towards care economy, lack of social protection, non recognition as worker or as contributor to economy are some of the reasons, which explain why women's participation in labour force is declining?

In developing countries like India such constraints are constantly pushing women from paid employment too unpaid domestic work, details of which can be seen in figure3. It is surprising to see that 57.5 percent women in urban areas and 51 percent women in rural areas between age group of 15-25are engaged in domestic work. The situations in the rural areas are slightly different. Although women, during the harvest season, work in the fields along with men but are not recognise as casual labourer. The family structure and social constraints in rural areas not allow women to work as full time labourer and thus all the domestic work is imposed upon them. The most painful fact is that they do not have any agency to speak for themselves. So in this context rural women are main victims of gender inequality.

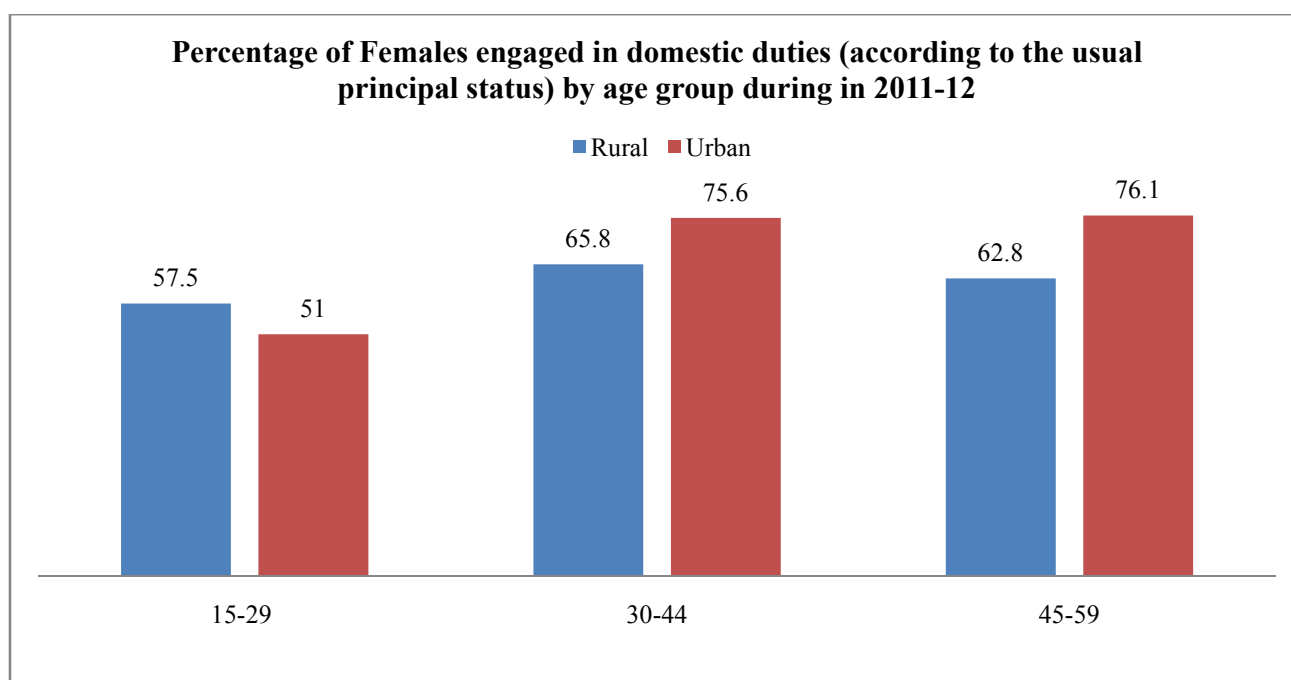


Figure 3.

Source: NSSO 68th Round 2014

Why We Need Policy Intervention?

According to Selim Jahan (Author of UN Report) “Earnings make for economic independence, a critical factor towards individual autonomy, voice, and agency in households and the community,” he writes. “An unequal distribution of care responsibilities in the household may require one parent to take time off more frequently than the other, reducing the former parent’s current and prospective earnings and perpetuating divergences.” [Jahan, 2014] This means that recognizing unpaid care work will help empowering women socially and economically. It will also be helpful in providing women with some degree of authority and power to fight or raise voices against exploitation as well as discrimination.

The global estimate of unpaid care and domestic work is around 13 percent of the global GDP. In the context of India recognition of unpaid work as legitimate work will account 39-40 percent of India’s GDP. [McKinsey, 2014] Such huge figures will not only help to increase India’s GDP but make India more gender just country. But so far these productive potentials of women are not taken into account for monetary calculations. Apart from GDP figures, recognizing unpaid work will be next move towards gender equality. Apart from this recognition of unpaid work as genuine work will be a move towards more holistic understanding of labour where work will be no longer seen merely as a value producing and exchange of services. Further we need to introduce organizational changes within paid employment so that men and women would be able to perform paid and unpaid work simultaneously. Additionally, introduction of certification of care workers and their skilling and training would be very important initiative in the context of formalizing and regulating care work. Moreover, recognition will also result in more gender parity in domestic and care work.

Conclusion

Unpaid care and domestic work is a major barrier in achieving gender equality. It is the missing link between increasing gender gaps and growing subjugation of women in society. In the country like India, a woman wake up early in the morning and goes last to bed after completing all works and this is their daily routine. Due to pressure to perform domestic duties, women of age group between 15-25, often compromise with their education. In rural areas girl drop-out rates in the schools are high because they are engaged in domestic work mainly unwillingly. Working women have to struggle to balance their domestic work and office work due to which they have to face stress, depression and physical pain. While on the other hand men enjoy more leisure time as they are free from domestic work. So in this context care and domestic work should not be solely imposed upon women but it should be equally distributed. We can not achieve women empowerment and will not be able to bridge increasing gender gaps until or unless we recognise unpaid domestic and care work.

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