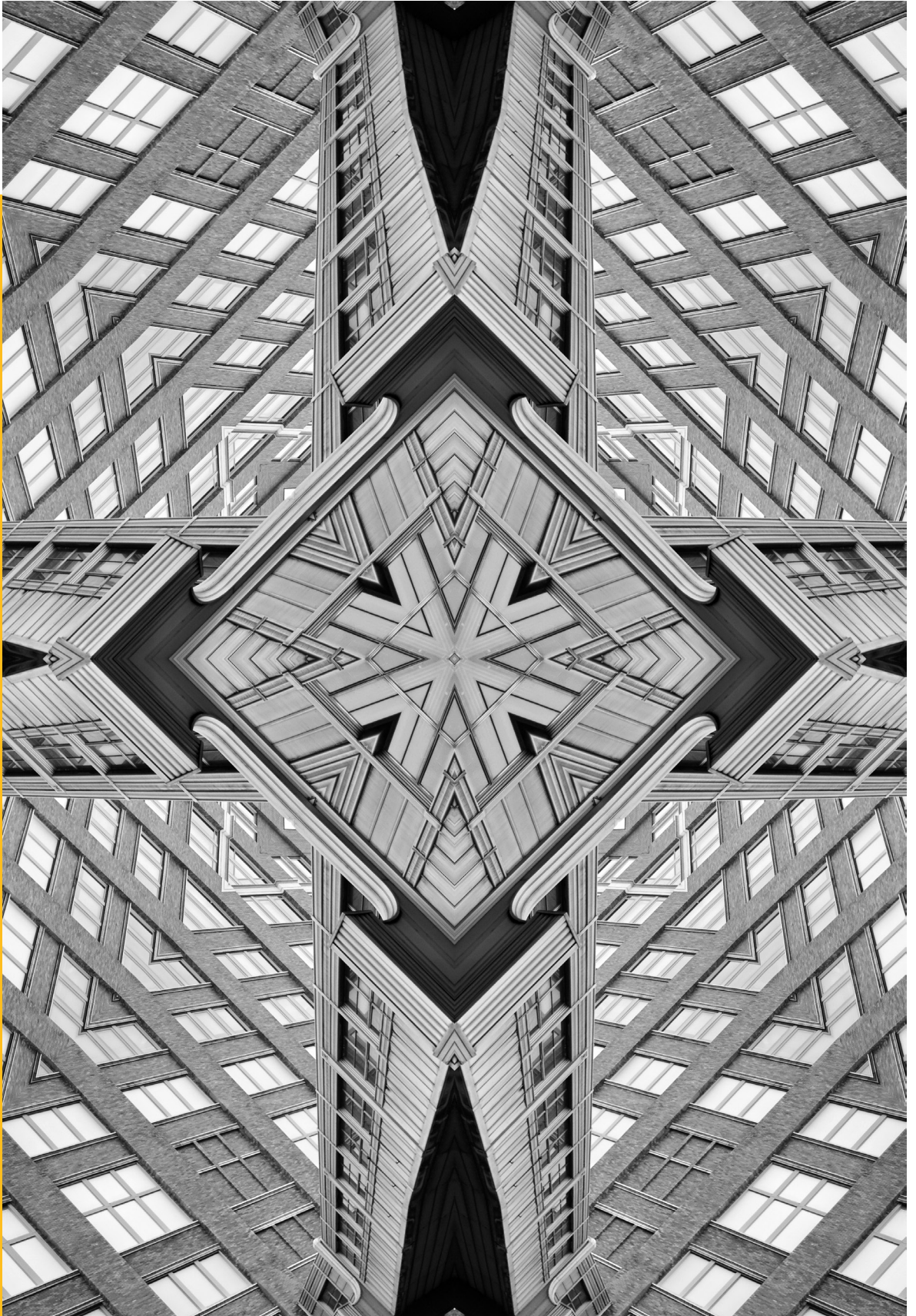


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Building India's Economy on the Backs of Women's Unpaid Work: A Gendered Analysis of Time-Use Data

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Abstract

This paper undertakes an analysis of the gender-disaggregated data from the National Statistical Organisation's Time-Use Survey 2019, and finds that Indian women spend eight times more hours on unpaid care work than men. The patterns are similar across educational qualification, and employment or marital status: women with higher education, or earn their own incomes, do not spend any less time on unpaid care work. Shifting mindsets and rebalancing domestic work requires coordinated effort from key stakeholders, with public-led investments in care infrastructure and services complemented by soft interventions from private sector employers and community-based organisations.

In the recent years, India has scored significant gains in various development parameters including economic growth, women's education, and reducing fertility rates. Yet, the country's Female Labour Force Participation Rates (FLFPR) remain amongst the lowest in the world.

The FLFPR (15 years and above) declined steadily from 47.1 percent in 1987-88 to 23 percent in 2017-18, reaching its nadir since Independence.¹ While it rose to 32.5 percent by 2020-21, it is still far below the 77 percent for men.² The difference between the proportion of men and that of women in the labour force has remained at ~40 percentage points over the last four decades.³ The marginal increases in women's workforce participation have come mainly from own-account workers or unpaid assistants in household enterprises in rural areas.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns had a disproportionate impact on women's employment compared to that of men. First, women bore the immediate consequence: by April 2020, 37.1 percent of adult women in the workforce (15 million) had lost their jobs, against 27.7 percent of men.⁵ Second, women's employment has been slower to recover: even in January 2022, women's labour force participation was 10-percent lower than it was in January 2020; for men, the drop was 2 percent.⁶ Third, the pandemic debilitated women-led enterprises and discouraged unemployed women from seeking work.⁷

The International Labor Organisation (ILO) estimates that unpaid care work is amongst the most critical barriers preventing women from joining and remaining in the workforce.⁸ This disproportionate burden of unpaid care work creates what is called "time poverty", which inhibits women's ability to dedicate time to paid work and acquire the skills necessary to seek better job opportunities. This experience is not unique to India. Globally, in 2016, 46.7 percent of women attributed their absence from the workforce to domestic duties, as compared to only 6.3 percent of men.⁹ Cross-country estimates in 2014 showed that a two-hour increase in unpaid labour commitments correlates with a decrease of 10 percent in the FLFPR.¹⁰

Introduction

Indeed, even prior to COVID-19, Indian women were spending about 8X more hours on care work as compared to men, according to 2019 data; the global average is 3X.¹¹ Women spend 335 minutes a day on unpaid domestic work, as compared to the 40 minutes of their male counterparts.¹² Beginning in March 2020, the pandemic lockdowns further increased women's burden of unpaid care work and imposed additional constraints to their economic participation. The closure of domestic support services—including schools and Anganwadi centres providing basic healthcare and child-care services—shifted the responsibility for their provision to the women of the household—i.e., the default unpaid caregivers.

Consultations by Nikore Associates—held between May and August 2022 to understand the impact of COVID-19 on women's work—^a revealed that regardless of geography or occupation, women in India consistently reported an increase in domestic workload since the start of the pandemic. Nearly 66 percent of informal women workers faced increased domestic duties while 36 percent had to do more child/elderly care responsibilities during the first two months of the lockdown.¹³ Some 43 percent of urban, female solo entrepreneurs reported a loss of productivity due to domestic work.¹⁴

As India attempts to move towards creating a more gender-inclusive economic system and distribute the care burden, pivotal questions arise: How deep are the gendered divisions of unpaid work in India? What are the causes and consequences of this unpaid care work being taken up mostly by women? Most importantly, how can key stakeholders work together to create an inclusive and efficient economy that aims to recognise, reduce, and redistribute women's care work responsibilities? This paper attempts to offer answers to these crucial questions.

a Nikore Associates is a youth-led economics research think tank, focusing on gender mainstreaming research and advocacy. Nikore Associates undertook ~100 consultations between May 2020 to August 2022 over four rounds in the form of key informant interviews with women respondents. These were spread across academic experts, members of women-led self-help-groups, leaders of community-based organisations working on women's welfare, women members of industry associations, women start-up founders, and women employed in the corporate sector. Unpaid work was a specific area of focus in these consultations across all four rounds.

Key Findings from the Time-Use Survey 2019

Time-use surveys are a globally accepted tool to measure the amount of time spent by persons within a country or sub-national region on various activities, such as paid work, education, unpaid work, and even leisure. India's first Time-Use Survey (TUS) was conducted by the National Statistical Organisation (NSO) between January and December 2019 and was published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).¹⁵ It covered nearly 83,000 rural and 56,000 urban households, under which 2.2 lakh females, 2.3 lakh males, and 130 transgender persons aged six and above were surveyed across 36 states and union territories. The findings reveal crucial patterns, both across states and country-wide, on how men, boys, women, and girls use their time on activities such as care work, employment, and learning. The following paragraphs discuss these findings in turn. (See Appendices for relevant raw numbers in detail.)

Women, on average, spend 46 percent of their waking hours on unpaid care work—8X the number of hours spent by men.

In both rural and urban areas, women of working age (15 – 59 years) spend a majority of their waking hours on unpaid work, whereas men spend a majority of their day in paid employment. While rural women spend 8.2X of their time on unpaid work, the difference is far more pronounced in urban areas, where women spend 9.6X more time on unpaid care work. This disproportionate time spent by women in care activities places India amongst the worst-performing countries, behind only China (72 percent) and South Africa (71 percent).¹⁶

**Table 1:
Gendered Burden: Time Spent on
Care Work by Men and Women
Across India**

Region	Time spent on care work by men	Time spent on care work by women	Gendered burden (women: men)
Overall	40 minutes	335 minutes	8.4X
Rural	42 minutes	344 minutes	8.2X
Urban	33 minutes	317 minutes	9.6X

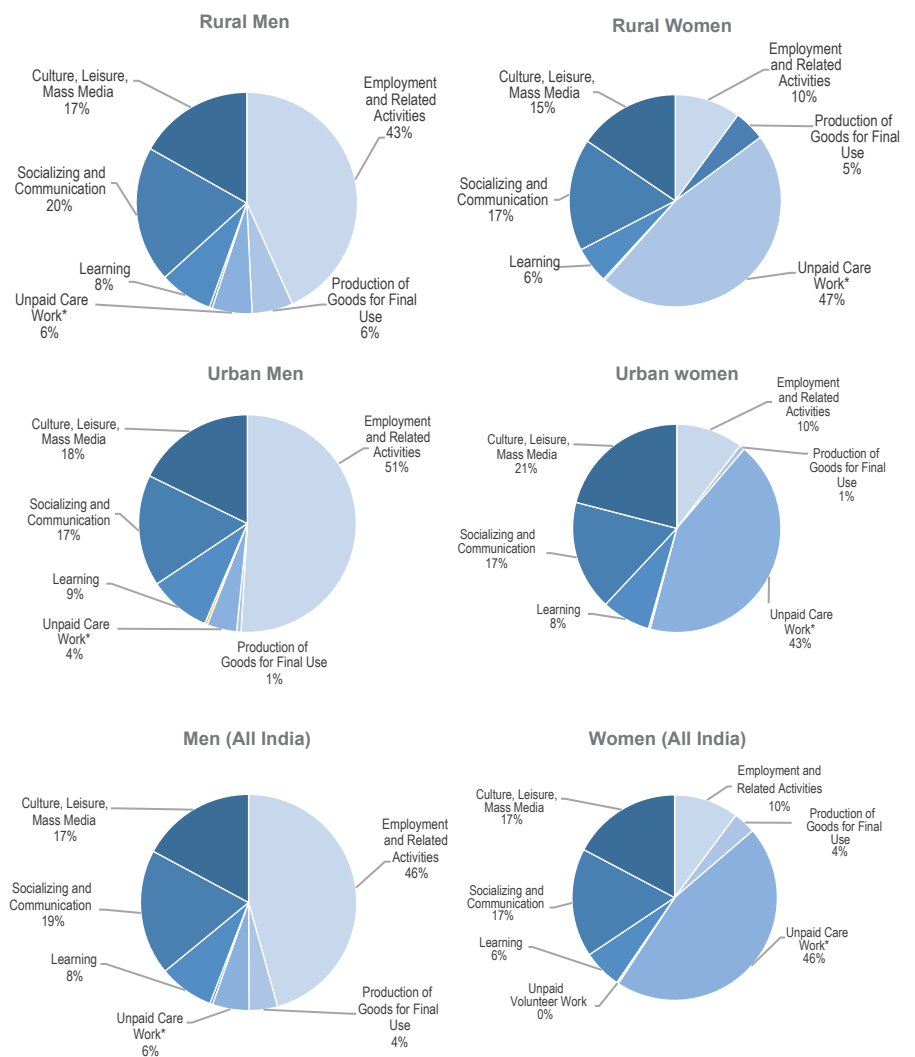
Source: Author's calculations based on summary data, Table 8, Appendix A, NSO TUS, 2019

The gender disparity in time allocation is the highest between time spent on unpaid care and activities related to employment. In comparison, the time spent on other activities, such as learning, socialising, and leisure, only have minor gender-based differences (See Figure 1). Women (15-59 years) in urban areas spend 47 percent of their waking hours, and women in rural areas, 43 percent, in unpaid care work; for men, it is 5 percent. In stark contrast, across rural and urban areas, men spend 46 percent of their waking hours on employment and related activities while women spend 10 percent.

The overall participation rates of men in unpaid care work activities are dismal in both urban and rural areas. More than 92 percent of women aged 15-59 years surveyed in the NSO TUS, 2019, participated in unpaid domestic services for household members, against 29 percent of men. In urban areas, men's participation was at 24.1 percent, and in rural districts, 31.2 percent.

Key Findings from the Time-Use Survey 2019

**Figure 1:
Time Distribution for Rural/Urban Men and Women (15-59 Age Group)**

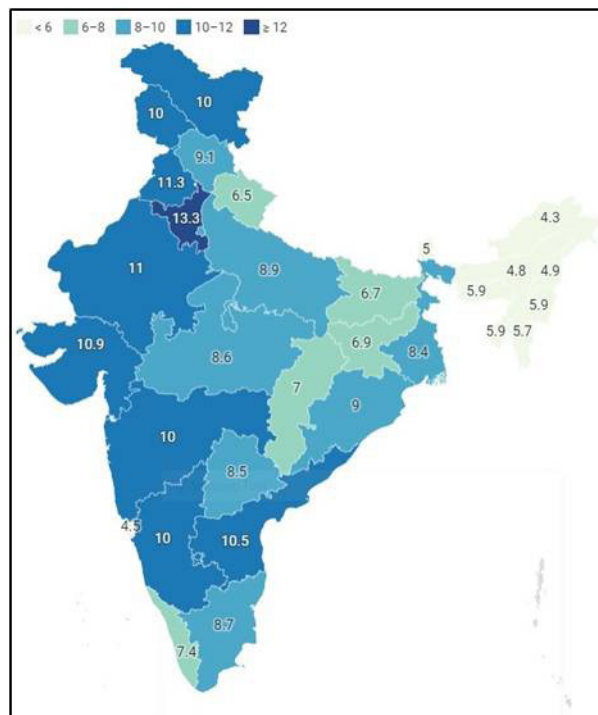


Source: Author's calculations based on summary data in Table 8, Appendix A, NSO TUS, 2019

Key Findings from the Time-Use Survey 2019

A state-wise analysis of the time spent in unpaid care shows that the disparity in the care work undertaken by men and women is the highest in the western and north-western parts of the country. In Haryana, the ratio of time spent in care work (women: men) stands at 13.3; in Punjab, 11.3; Rajasthan, 11; and Gujarat, 10.9. The ratios in the north-eastern states appear to be better: Arunachal Pradesh (4.3); Assam (4.8); and Nagaland (4.9); as well as in Goa (4.5).

**Figure 2:
Ratio of Care Work (Women: Men)
(15-59 years)**



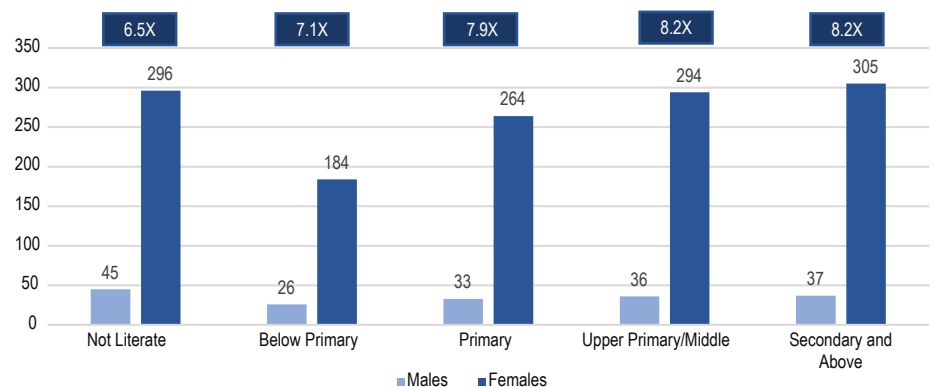
Source: Author's calculations based on unit-level data of NSO TUS, 2019

Females across all educational qualifications allocate a greater portion of time towards unpaid care work than males do.

Education does not appear to even out the distribution of care work between Indian males and females (aged six and above), with the disparity remaining high across all levels of education. Indeed, even as the ratio of time spent in care work is lowest between non-literate females and males—it widens as females’ education increases. Females with higher educational qualifications spend a marginally higher amount of time on unpaid care work, on average, than non-literate females. It is also notable that males with secondary education or higher spend less time on unpaid care work when compared to non-literate males (see Figure 3).

Moreover, male participation in unpaid work is highest amongst non-literate males in both rural and urban areas. Approximately 33 percent of non-literate males in rural areas reported participating in unpaid care work, against 24.7 percent of urban males who have passed at least secondary grade.

Figure 3:
Time Spent in Unpaid Care Work, by Educational Classification (Minutes per day)



Source: Author’s calculations based on summary data in Statement 11-12, NSO TUS, 2019

Note: Data pertains to persons aged six years and above.

Boxes show ratio (females: males) of unpaid care work for each category in educational qualification.

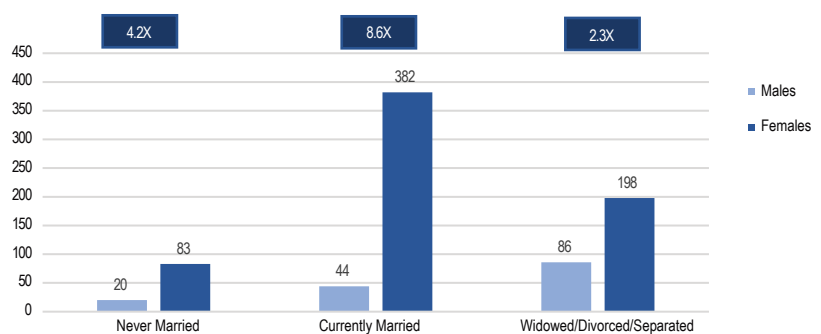
Married females shoulder a larger share of unpaid domestic work, compared to their unmarried counterparts.

Married females spend 8.6X the time married males spend on unpaid work. Meanwhile, the gendered burden of unpaid work on unmarried females is about half. Females who have never married at the time of the survey perform 4.2X the unpaid care work compared to never-married males. Amongst those who are widowed, divorced, or separated, the gap is narrowest at 2.3X (see Figure 4).

Married females spend 52 percent of their waking hours on unpaid care work compared to the 12 percent for never-married females. Married males spend 6 percent, and never-married males spend 3 percent of their waking hours on unpaid care work. There are no significant differences between the rural and urban areas.

While both married females and males have higher participation in unpaid care work, the gender gaps are wider for married individuals. About 97.2 percent of married females participate in the provision of domestic services, while 31.5 percent of married males do. In contrast, while 45.9 percent of never-married females undertake domestic work, only 16.6 percent of never-married males do.

Figure 4:
Time Spent by Males and Females on Unpaid Work, by Marital Status (Minutes per day)



Source: Author's calculations based on Table 21-22, Appendix A, NSO TUS, 2019

Note: Data pertains to persons aged six years and above.

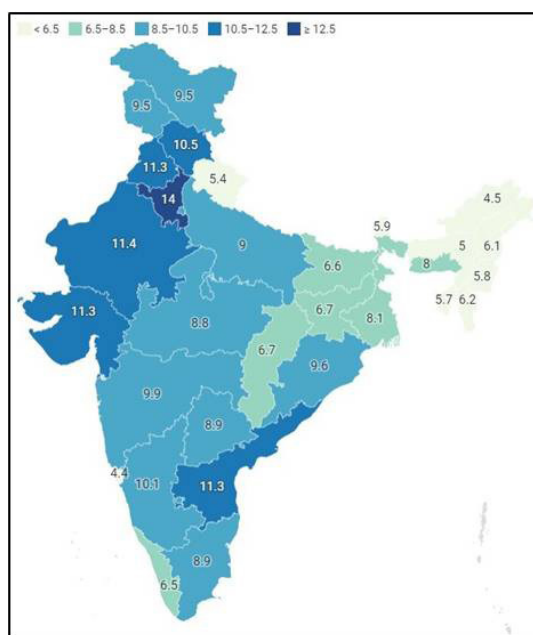
Boxes show ratio (females: males) of unpaid care work for each category according to marital status.

Key Findings from the Time-Use Survey 2019

Across the states, the average ratio of time spent on unpaid care by married individuals (females: males) is at four or more. However, Haryana had the highest gender disparity at 14.1, and Rajasthan follows at 11.4. At the lowest end of the spectrum are Goa (4.4) and Arunachal (4.5). Overall, amongst married persons, the eastern states, particularly those in the north-east, show the least inequitable gender-based distribution of unpaid work.

The skewed division of work is often the pivotal cause of “time poverty”, which leaves married females with less time to spend in employment than males. Inadequate care infrastructure and lack of partner and family support exacerbate the issue, forcing women to leave the workforce after marriage and be primarily responsible for household and child duties.¹⁷

**Figure 5:
Time Spent by Males and Females on Care Work Among Married Individuals (in Minutes) (Females: Males)**



Source: Author's calculations based on unit-level data of NSO TUS, 2019

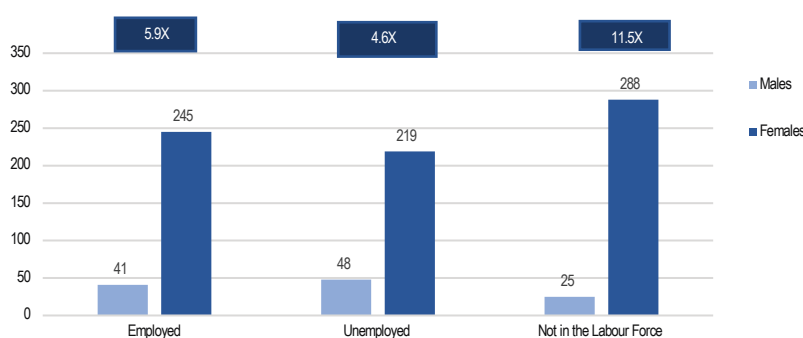
Note: Data pertains to persons aged six years and above.

Females in paid employment take on approximately 6X more unpaid care work than employed males.

Females engaged in the workforce experience the double burden of balancing paid work and unpaid care work responsibilities, performing up to 5.9X the unpaid care work as employed males. In comparison, females outside the labour force undertake 11.5X more unpaid work than their male counterparts. These findings suggest that undertaking paid work significantly improves the gender balance in the distribution of unpaid work.

Almost 93 percent of working females in the NSO TUS 2019 sample performed unpaid domestic services for household members, against only 31 percent of working males. On the other hand, 33.9 percent of unemployed males and 16.1 percent of males not in the labour force^b participated in unpaid work, vs. 85.6 percent and 78.4 percent of females, respectively. Therefore, while the proportion of females carrying the burden of unpaid care work is greater than their male counterparts across all categories of employment, unemployed males are more likely to take on the burden than employed males and males outside the labour force.

Figure 6:
Average Time Spent on Unpaid Work by Males and Females across Employment Categories (All-India) (Minutes per day)



Source: Author's calculations based on summary data of Statement 13 & 14, NSO TUS, 2019

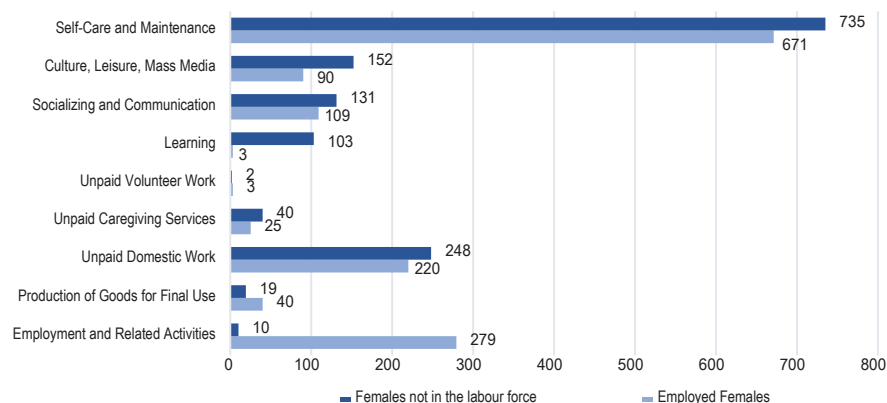
Note: Data pertains to persons aged six years and above.

Boxes show ratio (females: males) of unpaid care work across employment categories.

b 'Unemployed' is defined as "seeking/available for work, part of the labour force, but not currently working"; 'not in the labour force' implies "neither working, nor available for work".

The difference in time spent on unpaid care work between employed females and those outside the labour force is only about 43 minutes per day, with the former spending more time on unpaid work. Employed females give up other activities such as self-care and maintenance (including sleep), leisure and cultural activities, learning, and socialisation, to make time for employment-related activities.

Figure 7:
Average Time Spent on Unpaid Care Work by Females, by Employment Status (All India) (Minutes per day)

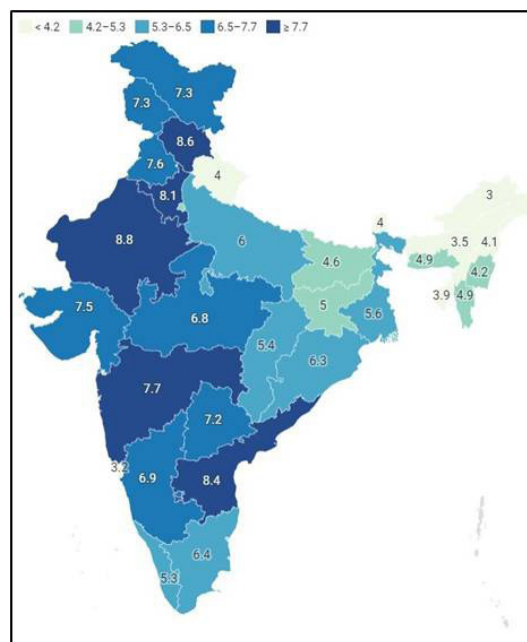


Source: Author's calculations based on summary data of Statement 13 & 14, NSO TUS, 2019

Note: Data pertains to females aged six years and above.

Across states, the disparity between working males and working females is highest for Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, with women undertaking 8.8X and 8.6X unpaid work, respectively. The disparity is lower in the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh (3.0) and in Goa (3.2). Eastern states, such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal are middling, with working females performing between 5X to 6X unpaid work than males.

**Figure 8:
Ratio of Care Work Among Working Persons (Females: Males)**

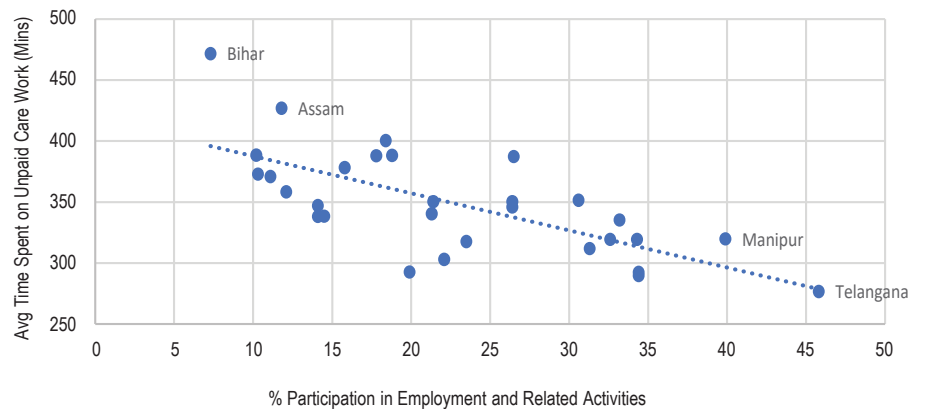


Source: Author's calculations based on unit-level data of NSO TUS, 2019

Note: Data pertains to persons aged six years and above.

Moreover, cross-sectional analysis across states shows that there is a significant negative correlation between participation in employment and time spent on domestic responsibilities amongst working-age females. It may therefore be inferred that as females reduce the time spent on unpaid work, they are able to take up paid employment. However, no significant correlation could be observed between time spent by males on domestic work and female employment participation.

**Figure 9:
Correlation Between Employment
Participation and Time Spent on
Unpaid Care Work for Females Across
States**



Source: Author's calculations based on unit-level and summary data of NSO TUS, 2019
Note: Data pertains to women aged 15-59 years.

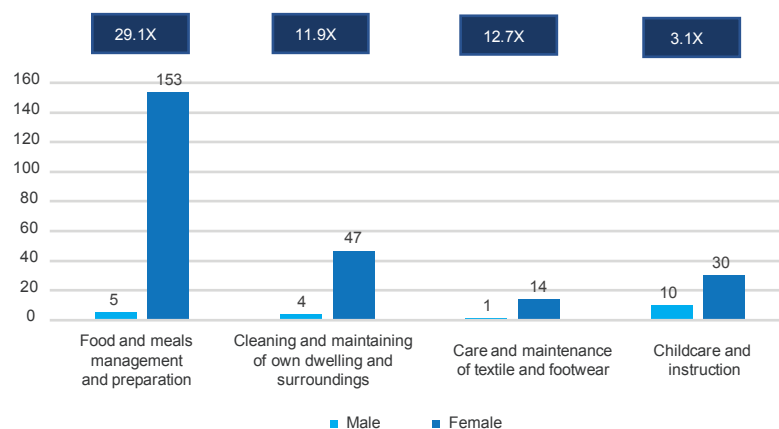
Cooking, cleaning, and childcare occupy almost 85 percent of time spent on unpaid work.

Females, as compared to males, spend 29.1X more time on food preparation and management, 11.9X on cleaning and maintenance, and 3X on childcare. While food preparation occupies about 56 percent of average time spent on unpaid work in a day, 17 percent is on cleaning, and 11 percent on childcare. Females also spend 12.7X more time on care and maintenance of clothes and footwear,^c and 2.2X on caring for dependent adults. A regional analysis of data reveals similar trends across rural and urban areas.

^c The TUS Activity Classification is based on the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics, 2016 (ICATUS 2016). As per the TUS Activity Classification (TUS, 2019), the sub-category "Care and maintenance of textiles and footwear" includes

1. Hand/machine-washing clothes
2. Drying textiles and clothing
3. Ironing/pressing/folding
4. Mending/repairing of clothes and shoes; cleaning and polishing shoes
5. Other activities related to textiles and footwear

Figure 10:
Average Time Spent on Unpaid Domestic and Care Activities (Minutes per day)



Source: Author's calculations based on summary data in Table 8, Appendix A, NSO TUS, 2019

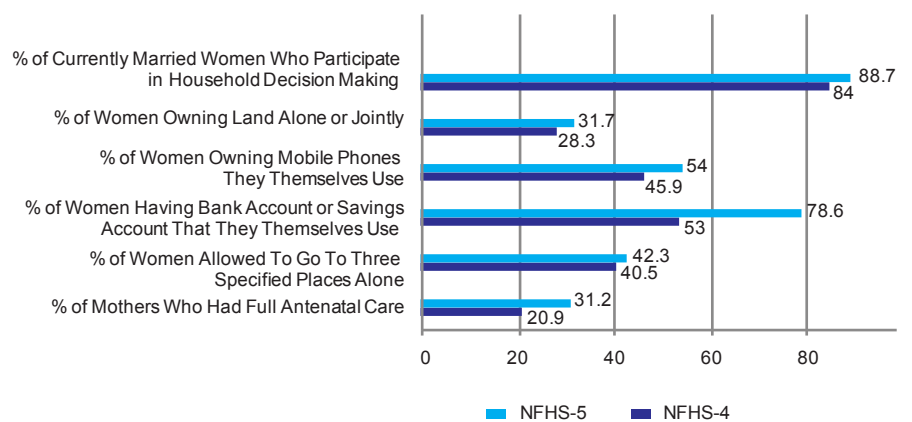
Note: Data pertains to persons aged six years and above.

Boxes show ratio (females: males) of unpaid care work across various domestic and care activities.

Social norms concerning unpaid work appear persistent and are not correlated with other measures of women's empowerment.

Over the last five years, certain indicators of women's empowerment, as measured by the National Family and Health Surveys in 2015-16 (NFHS-4)¹⁸ and in 2019-21 (NFHS-5),¹⁹ have shown significant shifts. For example, the proportion of women with bank accounts increased from 53 percent to 78.6 percent, access to mobile phones improved from 45.9 percent to 53.9 percent, and the percentage of mothers who received all recommended types of antenatal care went up from 20.9 percent to 31.2 percent. The percentage of women who reported having the mobility to go on their own to the market, a health facility, and places outside the village or community also improved, from 40.5 percent in 2015-16 to 42.3 percent in 2019-21, indicating an increase in freedom of movement.

**Figure 11:
Improvement in Measures of Women’s
Empowerment (NFHS-4 & NFHS-5)**



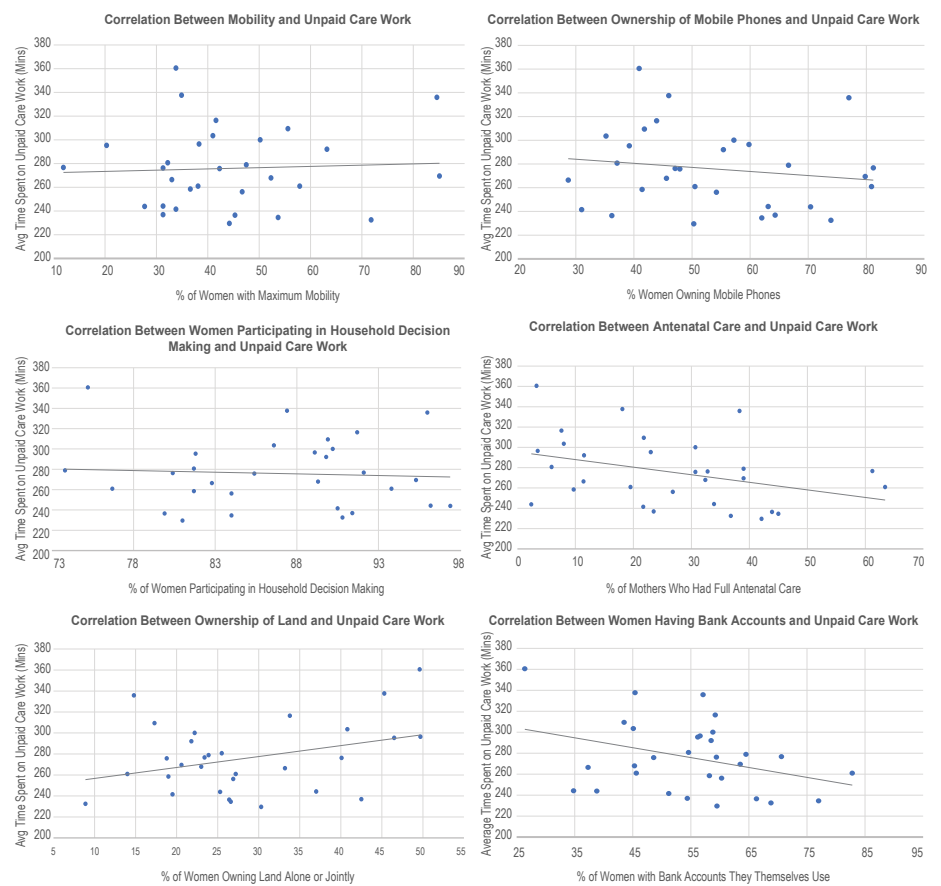
Source: NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 National Factsheets and Reports

Note: Data pertains to persons in the working ages (15-59 years).

A cross-sectional analysis across states shows that the time spent on unpaid work is not correlated with women’s mobility, agency, and financial and digital inclusion. Even in states where a greater proportion of women owned mobile phones, had their own bank accounts, had a voice in household decisions, owned land, or had more independent mobility in 2015-16, the time spent by women on unpaid work was not significantly lower in 2019. The same consultations undertaken by Nikore Associates mentioned earlier in the paper, showed that during COVID-19, women across socio-economic groups, states, and work status experienced a significant increase in the burden of unpaid work. This suggests that norms and familial expectations from women concerning domestic and care work are persistent.

Key Findings from the Time-Use Survey 2019

**Figure 12:
Unpaid Work and Empowerment
Indicators for Women Across States:
Correlation Not Found**



Source: Author's calculations based on summary data of NSO TUS, 2019, and NFHS-4 (2015-16) factsheets

Note: These charts show that there is no statistically significant correlation between the average time spent by females on unpaid work and the various indicators of women's empowerment as measured by the National Family Health Survey (4th Round).

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

This section outlines this paper's recommendations for key stakeholders, including the public and private sectors as well as Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). The aim is to recognise, reduce, and redistribute women's unpaid domestic work by building an inclusive care economy, enabling livelihood opportunities for women, and more equitably distributing care work within households.

A. Investment in the care economy by the public sector

In India, women's unpaid work is valued at 3.1 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and yet, public sector expenditure on care infrastructure—including pre-primary education, childcare centres, and maternity, disability, and sickness benefits—stands at less than 1 percent of the GDP.²⁰ A 2017 analysis by the Women's Budget Group found that if an additional 2 percent of the GDP were invested in the Indian health and care sector, the country could generate 11 million additional jobs, nearly one-third of which would go to women.²¹ Central and state governments must actively invest in building care infrastructure and the provision of care services to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women, enabling their economic participation.

1. Investment in care infrastructure for children and the elderly: India needs a medium-term plan to increase public investment in care infrastructure and incentivise Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for a sustained and gender-inclusive post-pandemic recovery. Estimates suggest that by 2050, 18.3 percent of India's population will be aged 60 years and above, concentrated in rural areas and lower-income families, with approximately one-third of the elderly population falling below the poverty line.^{22,23} Moreover, data suggests that childcare is the third biggest consumer of women's time spent in unpaid work. Therefore, India must invest in establishing care facilities for children (e.g., Anganwadi centres) and elderly persons, and upgrading existing ones, with a strong focus on creating rural care infrastructure.

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

Box 1: The American Jobs Plan and Care Infrastructure

Under the American Jobs Plan, the Joe Biden government has proposed to allocate US\$400 billion towards constructing affordable home or community-based facilities for elderly care as well as a US\$25 billion Childcare Growth and Innovation Fund to upgrade government childcare centres. These public investments are the foundation for future productivity gains for women, supporting them as they participate in the workforce while recognising the negative impacts of the unpaid care work burden on women's labour force participation.

Source: The White House²⁴

Box 2: The Child Care Incentive Fund by the World Bank

Globally, over 40 percent of children below the school-entry age require childcare; these services, however, remain largely inaccessible. This challenge is being addressed by the 'Childcare Incentive Fund,' an initiative by the World Bank Group. Committing US\$180 million to make adequate investments in quality, affordable childcare at the national level in low- and middle-income countries, the organisation will support the design and implementation of better childcare programs. The fund will also improve policies, build capacity, generate data, and provide evidence on the impacts of childcare on women's empowerment, early childhood development, and inclusive economic growth.

Source: World Bank²⁵

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

2. Formalisation of current care work structures: India's 2.5 million Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), Auxiliary Nurse-Midwives (ANMs), and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) form the backbone of current care services across the country. These women, whose work during COVID-19 has been recognised and awarded by the World Health Organisation (WHO),²⁶ continue to be largely categorised as “volunteers” and not employees. Consequently, in several states, these essential-care workers do not receive fixed monthly incomes and social security benefits, making it impossible to account for their economic contribution in the calculation of India's GDP. In line with the 2020 recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour,²⁷ ASHAs, ANMs, and AWWs should be recognised as employees and their base salaries increased by central and state-level committees. Moreover, their crucial services necessitate a new organisational framework with comprehensive job roles and payment bands commensurate with skills, duty hours, and experience.

Box 3: **Efforts by state governments to fix minimum wages for ASHA workers**

Following the lead of West Bengal and Rajasthan, other states like Haryana, Karnataka, and Odisha have decided to pay fixed monthly amounts in the range of INR 2,000 to INR 6,000 to ASHAs. Andhra Pradesh announced a hike to INR 10,000 per month in 2019, whereas Maharashtra increased honorariums by INR 1,500 to INR 7,500, including INR 500 for COVID-19 duties in June 2021. Punjab also increased the monthly remuneration of Anganwadi workers by INR 1,000 to INR 6,300, with an increment of INR 500 every month. A vast number of states, however, continue with variable pay regimes.

Source: Websites of state governments and news reports ^{28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35}

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

3. Domestic workers, another category of care workers, also require social safeguards, such as a minimum wage rate and safer working conditions: State governments can formulate necessary policies and regulatory frameworks in alignment with the National Platform for Domestic Workers Bill 2016 and the National Policy on Domestic Workers to formalise working conditions for India's 3.9 million domestic workers. This would enable them to register as workers and accord them rights such as minimum wages, social security, and the right to association.

Box 4: Maharashtra's registry for domestic workers

The state of Maharashtra formed the Domestic Workers Welfare Board (DWWB) in 2011 to register domestic workers and ensure they receive statutory benefits under central and state government schemes. In May 2021, during the second wave of COVID-19 in India, the state government announced a cash transfer of INR 1,500 each, benefitting the Board's ~105,000 registered domestic workers.

Source: News Reports ^{36,37}

4. Training and upskilling: Linked to a detailed organisational framework, there is a need to focus on reskilling and upskilling of care workers such as AWWs, ANMs, and ASHAs. Appropriate programs for care economy workers can be devised under the National Association for Healthcare Quality Framework,³⁸ which comprehensively covers healthcare quality competency by providing thematic and practical training. Moreover, work experience and skill training-based certifications should be introduced to institute seniority levels and specialisations amongst care workers. Specialised training for themes like nutrition, maternal health, or early learning should be offered, linked with higher pay.

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

B. Institutional ecosystem through the private sector for corporate working women

A gender-equitable and safe work environment with family-friendly policies that encourage the reduction and redistribution of care work responsibilities enables firms to attract and retain talent and boost productivity and profits.³⁹ Indian enterprises, particularly in organised, service sectors face the challenge of designing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies that enable women to realise their potential at the workplace while simultaneously acknowledging, considering, yet challenging social norms around unpaid care work. In this regard, the private sector can adopt the following interventions to support families:

1. **Infrastructure and monetary support for childcare, elderly care, and long-term care:** Employers can provide working parents (particularly mothers) with access to care services and infrastructure within the vicinity of the workplace. While creche facilities are mandatory under the Maternity Benefits Act, 2017, employers can also provide a range of additional in-situ services such as breastfeeding/lactation rooms, resting rooms for use during menstruation, and parking facilities for pregnant women. Companies may also support employees by hiring care service providers for childcare, elder care, or long-term care support through either corporate partnerships or financial incentives. These strategies should be designed after consultations with employees to understand their needs across functions, divisions, and seniority levels.

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

Box 5: Business cases for providing childcare services at the corporate level

HSBC India, along with providing creches for new mothers, increased the scope of the policy in 2020 to cover all primary caregivers and added new options to allow flexibility and help employees balance work and caregiving. They also host a suite of other resources: daycares near home or office, nanny care, and virtual care, and provide reimbursement for expenses. Firms such as Apple, Facebook, and Bumble have implemented benefits such as IUI/IVF, egg freezing discounts, lactation rooms, and free breast milk shipments.

Source: Economic Times,⁴⁰ Nikore Associates Gender Primer⁴¹

2. Care work leave policies: Parental leaves have been found to be essential for the health of the child and the mother, promoting equitable household work division and increasing child bonding.⁴² Going beyond the statutory requirements of six months of maternity leave, employers can introduce gender-neutral, job-protected, fully funded care work leaves that facilitate return to the same employer for talent retention and career growth. In addition to parental leaves, care work leave policies can cover childcare leave and family leave to care for a family member.

Reimagining India's Care Economy and Ecosystems

Box 6: Innovative ways towards implementing care work-supportive leave policies

Procter & Gamble's 'Share the Care' is an inclusive policy that aims to enable all new working parents to avail of parental leave irrespective of their gender or marital status. It entitles all new parents—including biological parents, domestic partners, adoptive parents, or parents in same-sex couples—to eight weeks of fully-paid leave. It is a step towards shifting cultural norms in India by removing biases in child caregiving. Similarly, Deutsche Bank India offers 26 weeks of leave to primary caregivers irrespective of gender. Zomato also launched a progressive leave policy, granting 26 weeks in paternity leave.

Source: Nikore Associates Gender Primer⁴³

3. Flexible working: Employers should provide a range of flexible work arrangements including flex-time, reduced working hours, job-sharing, switches to part-time work, and telecommuting options to nurture a more inclusive and accommodative culture towards the care work burden on women, and to encourage men to share the responsibility of domestic work.

Box 7: Flexi-work arrangements at Ford Technology Services India

Ford Technology Services India extends its Transitional Work Arrangement program to employees whose other responsibilities consume a significant portion of their time. Registering with this program gives the employee the option of working either 60 percent or 80 percent of the expected 45-hour work week with a corresponding decrease in salary.

Source: Nikore Associates Gender Primer⁴⁴

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4. Advocacy and shaping attitudes: Deep commitment to gender diversity exhibited by senior management can seep into the company culture. In this regard, Indian firms are in a unique position to influence the socialised attitudes of their male employees towards childcare and domestic work. Company leaders acting as champions and advocates for women's employment can influence attitudes in their teams and facilitate conversations about sharing domestic work. Companies can also facilitate the creation of peer support networks for employees managing childcare, elderly care, or long-term care of family members who are ill.

C. Community-Level Interventions

1. Upscaling CBO-based care solutions to establish social enterprises: Grassroot-level CBOs can be ideal care service providers, particularly in the informal sector. These organisations are not only affordable, but their deep, local connections within communities allow them to gain trust and influence attitudes by facilitating conversations around issues of gender equality. For instance, CBOs like Apnalaya support Community Childcare Centres (CCC) operated by women in Mumbai's informal settlements (see Box 8), creating not only dependable care ecosystems, but also employment for women.

Box 8: CBOs supporting childcare infrastructure in Mumbai's informal settlements

Apnalaya is a CBO that runs CCCs in Mumbai's informal settlements. Operated by women, Apnalaya's 44 CCCs were shuttered during the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic. By September 2020, only six remained operational. However, as of March 2021, 35 CCCs had reopened and 12 new centres were established and are currently functional. Consultations with Apnalaya revealed that CCCs improve women's workforce participation: 79 percent of users were working mothers, and following the closure of CCCs, 14 percent of all users were forced to quit their jobs owing to an increased burden of childcare. Additionally, CCCs serve as a source of employment. For 50 percent of CCC operators, this was their first job.

Source: Nikore Associates' consultations with Apnalaya

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CBOs providing innovative care solutions can be supported by governments. Private enterprises can also provide them financing as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) budgets. Through partnerships with formal sector enterprises, these CBOs may provide in-situ care facilities to workers in factories and other work locations. Collaborations with corporations can also allow CBOs to scale up their operations, helping them become financially viable social enterprises (see Box 9).^{45,46}

Box 9: Collaborations between the formal sector and CBOs for the provision of affordable care services

Kidogo, a Kenyan enterprise, harnesses the power of social franchising to deliver affordable, high-quality childcare by collaborating with women running informal day cares in Kenya's urban slums. Each operator undergoes six months of rigorous training focusing on early childhood development and entrepreneurship. They are also provided infrastructural support in the form of renovations. Their performance is monitored on the basis of a minimum standard of quality.

Source: Carsey School of Public Policy, University of New Hampshire⁴⁷

2. Partnerships to engage men and boys, encouraging them to redistribute unpaid work within the household: In order to successfully implement sensitisation and awareness programs aimed at inculcating gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours, particularly with regard to unpaid work, governments can partner with CBOs to capitalise on the trust and support they enjoy from the community. CBOs can facilitate meaningful discussions which engage men and boys on the issue of redistribution of domestic work.

Conclusion

Globally, the number of hours that women spend on unpaid care work is three times (3X) more than that of men; in India, this difference is 8X. A gender disaggregated analysis of the National Statistical Organisation's Time Use Survey data from 2019, pre-pandemic, shows that regardless of educational qualification, employment, or marital status, women bear a disproportionate share of unpaid work. Women across all educational qualifications allocate more time to unpaid work than men, with this gendered disparity increasing for persons with higher levels of education. Women in paid employment take on approximately 6X more unpaid care work than employed men—a clear evidence of the double burden of balancing paid and unpaid work that falls unfairly on women. Statistical analysis also shows that, across states, the time spent by women on unpaid work is not significantly correlated with measures of women's empowerment including mobility, agency over household decisions, having a bank account, or ownership of mobile phones.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of a range of domestic support services, including schools, basic healthcare, and child-care centres, shifting the responsibility for their provision to women who are the default unpaid caregivers. Regardless of geography or occupational status, women consistently reported a sharp increase in domestic workload since the start of the pandemic.

Indeed, women's unpaid work is valued at 3.1 percent of GDP in India. Yet, the country spends less than 1 percent of GDP on care infrastructure, including pre-primary education, childcare centres, maternity, disability and sickness benefits. Investing in the care economy is therefore a crucial strategy for stimulating women's employment, and preventing occupational downgrade amongst women in the workforce.

Conclusion

A medium-term plan to increase public investment in care infrastructure and services, formalisation of care work and recognising volunteers as workers, as well as incentivising public private partnerships, are necessary steps that can be led by governments. For their part, private sector employers can contribute by formulating gender-sensitive care work policies as well as building partnerships to support community-based care service providers through their CSR activities. Most importantly, governments, private sector, and community-based organisation can work together to shift mindsets and encourage a long-overdue redistribution of domestic work responsibilities. [ORF](#)

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Appendix 1:

National Time Distribution (15-59 Age Group)						
Major Activities	Rural		Urban		Rural + Urban	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Employment and Related Activities	311	74	381	77	333	75
Production of Goods for Final Use	43	35	5	6	31	26
Unpaid Care Work*	42	344	33	317	40	335
Unpaid Volunteer Work	3	2	3	2	3	2
Learning	56	41	69	56	60	45
Socialising and Communication	143	126	124	126	137	126
Culture, Leisure, Mass Media	121	114	133	155	125	127
Total	719	736	748	739	729	736

Source: Table 8, Appendix A, TUS 2019

Note: Minutes might not total 1440 due to rounding off

*Time spent on unpaid domestic work and caregiving services are combined under the head 'Unpaid Care Work' in all tables in this paper.

Appendix 2:

State	Unpaid Domestic Work + Unpaid Caregiving (19-59)		Ratio of Unpaid Care Work (Women: Men)
	Male	Female	
Andhra Pradesh	27.65	292.32	10.6
Arunachal Pradesh	84.04	358.39	4.3
Assam	88.49	426.98	4.8
Bihar	70.91	471.81	6.7
Chattisgarh	44.60	311.95	7.0
Delhi	37.85	347.01	9.2
Goa	71.34	319.30	4.5
Gujarat	32.18	351.47	10.9
Haryana	25.37	338.21	13.3
Himachal Pradesh	33.20	303.05	9.1
Jammu and Kashmir	33.66	338.40	10.1
Jharkhand	56.36	388.51	6.9
Karnataka	33.96	345.98	10.2
Kerala	47.41	350.30	7.4
Madhya Pradesh	40.81	350.31	8.6
Maharashtra	33.71	335.33	9.9
Manipur	54.51	319.80	5.9
Meghalaya	54.43	317.53	5.8
Mizoram	67.57	387.29	5.7
Nagaland	59.63	292.50	4.9
Odisha	41.34	378.29	9.2
Punjab	34.27	387.97	11.3
Rajasthan	30.86	340.48	11.0
Sikkim	64.52	319.39	5.0
Tamil Nadu	33.24	289.69	8.7
Telangana	32.73	276.72	8.5
Tripura	68.31	400.38	5.9
Uttar Pradesh	41.76	372.86	8.9
Uttarakhand	57.03	370.91	6.5
West Bengal	46.33	388.30	8.4

Source: Unit-level data, TUS 2019

Appendix 3:

Avg. Time Spent Per Person (Mins) on Major Activities (All-India)												
Major Activity	Male						Female					
	Not Literate	Below Primary	Primary	Upper Primary/Middle	Secondary and Above	All	Not Literate	Below Primary	Primary	Upper Primary/Middle	Secondary and Above	All
Employment and Related Activities	297.7	144.5	233.9	275.2	295.3	263.0	84.1	37.0	50.7	48.5	60.4	61.3
Production of Goods for Final Use	50.1	20.0	28.4	31.1	20.8	28.3	40.5	16.2	20.8	19.4	12.0	23.2
Unpaid Domestic Work	34.2	16.3	23.7	25.4	25.6	25.3	263.1	158.3	228.9	255.6	258.7	242.8
Unpaid Care Services	11.0	9.8	9.8	10.3	11.6	10.6	32.6	26.2	35.0	38.3	46.6	37.0
Unpaid Volunteer Work	2.5	1.7	2.1	3.0	3.3	2.8	2.2	1.4	2.1	1.8	2.2	2.0
Learning	12.8	209.2	135.3	104.0	85.9	101.8	6.0	182.9	123.2	108.7	86.5	83.8
Socializing and Communication	160.0	104.6	126.1	130.2	138.6	134.4	149.0	103.7	117.0	120.1	121.4	126.9
Culture, Leisure, Mass Media	120.6	173.3	146.1	137.4	149.7	145.1	123.9	164.2	140.9	135.0	150.3	140.7
Self Care and Maintenance	751.0	760.0	734.0	723.0	710.0	729.0	738.0	749.0	721.0	713.0	702.0	723.0
Total	1440.0	1439.4	1439.3	1439.5	1440.8	1440.3	1439.4	1438.9	1439.6	1440.5	1440.2	1440.6
Avg. Time Spent Per Person (Mins) on Major Activities (Rural)												
	Male						Female					
	Not Literate	Below Primary	Primary	Upper Primary/Middle	Secondary and Above	All	Not Literate	Below Primary	Primary	Upper Primary/Middle	Secondary and Above	All
Employment and Related Activities	286.9	144.4	223.5	260.3	264.0	243.5	84.7	37.9	51.6	49.9	51.2	60.9
Production of Goods for Final Use	57.6	24.9	35.6	40.8	34.2	38.8	46.9	20.0	26.1	24.9	19.4	30.8
Unpaid Domestic Work	36.0	17.7	25.6	26.9	27.2	27.1	268.5	167.4	235.0	258.8	265.5	247.1
Unpaid Care Services	10.9	10.5	10.3	11.0	11.9	11.1	32.8	28.3	36.8	40.1	48.6	37.2
Unpaid Volunteer Work	2.5	1.7	2.1	3.2	3.3	2.8	2.1	1.2	2.0	1.7	2.2	2.0
Learning	12.1	202.0	133.1	101.2	91.9	101.7	5.3	178.4	122.4	110.0	95.5	81.9
Socializing and Communication	162.6	107.9	115.9	134.8	144.0	138.5	148.0	104.7	115.8	118.0	119.6	126.8
Culture, Leisure, Mass Media	117.0	168.0	141.8	134.0	145.5	140.9	115.2	155.0	130.5	124.0	136.6	129.1
Self Care and Maintenance	754.0	763.0	738.0	728.0	718.0	737.0	736.0	747.0	719.0	713.0	701.0	724.0
Total	1439.6	1440.0	1425.9	1440.2	1440.0	1441.4	1439.5	1439.9	1439.2	1440.3	1439.6	1439.6

Avg. Time Spent Per Person (Mins) on Major Activities (Urban)												
	Male						Female					
	Not Literate	Below Primary	Primary	Upper Primary/Middle	Secondary and Above	All	Not Literate	Below Primary	Primary	Upper Primary/Middle	Secondary and Above	All
Employment and Related Activities	355.2	144.9	266.8	315.8	335.1	307.4	81.8	34.2	48.0	45.2	70.5	62.6
Production of Goods for Final Use	10.2	3.4	5.0	5.1	3.6	4.6	9.2	3.6	5.5	6.2	4.0	5.3
Unpaid Domestic Work	25.5	11.3	17.9	21.3	23.2	21.2	241.1	129.1	210.2	247.4	251.1	232.1
Unpaid Care Services	10.5	7.1	8.2	8.1	11.2	9.9	31.2	19.2	29.8	33.5	44.2	36.3
Unpaid Volunteer Work	2.4	1.6	2.0	2.3	3.3	2.8	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.0	2.2	2.2
Learning	15.7	234.5	143.2	112.3	78.4	101.4	9.4	198.2	125.2	106.5	77.3	88.0
Socializing and Communication	144.8	93.1	113.8	118.8	131.2	125.0	152.7	102.2	120.4	125.4	124.3	126.1
Culture, Leisure, Mass Media	138.7	194.1	162.7	147.6	154.7	157.5	163.7	195.5	169.8	161.5	164.9	167.8
Self Care and Maintenance	737.0	749.0	720.0	708.0	699.0	711.0	748.0	755.0	728.0	713.0	702.0	720.0
Total	1439.9	1439.1	1439.5	1439.3	1439.8	1440.7	1439.4	1439.1	1439.1	1440.6	1440.6	1440.4

Appendix 4:

% of Waking Hours Spent on Major Activities								
Major Activity	Male				Female			
	Never married	Currently married	Widowed/ Divorced/ Separated	All	Never married	Currently married	Widowed/ Divorced/ Separated	All
Employment and Related Activities	17.85	50.14	28.74	36.97	4.44	9.187	15.27	8.538
Production of Goods for Final Use	1.469	5.567	6.069	3.98	1.201	4.003	3.697	3.233
Unpaid Domestic Work	2.226	4.064	11.1	3.559	10.95	44.56	26.72	33.83
Unpaid Care Services	0.603	2.104	2.042	1.496	0.922	7.221	3.395	5.154
Unpaid Volunteer Work	0.325	0.422	0.388	0.387	0.256	0.277	0.313	0.276
Learning	36.23	0.296	0.18	14.31	43.39	0.236	0.135	11.67
Socializing and Communication	15.67	20.58	26.68	18.89	14.77	17.57	25.95	17.68
Culture, Leisure, Mass Media	25.63	16.82	24.8	20.4	24.07	16.94	24.52	19.61

Appendix 5:

Time (Minutes) Spent on Unpaid Domestic Work & Unpaid Care Work, by State										
State	Male					Female				
	Never Married	Currently Married	Widowed	Divorced	Total	Never Married	Currently Married	Widowed	Divorced	Total
Andhra Pradesh	11.85	28.2	83.69	67.92	24.31	53.66	319.7	182.6	185.1	236.5
Arunachal Pradesh	36.58	85.75	171.4	123.7	70.74	112.6	385.6	207.9	302.1	296.5
Assam	35.19	92.73	150.2	181.3	73.75	76.58	459.6	249.3	318.2	337.7
Bihar	26.98	72.32	137.4	107.8	56.25	72.89	480.3	264.3	346.5	360.6
Chattisgarh	20.23	49.38	90.28	94.85	39.18	94.42	332.8	180.6	200.3	241.6
Delhi	25.82	37.75	61.5	184.4	33.41	72.82	388.1	222.3	184.1	279
Goa	40.65	87.5	273	44.72	69.35	71.74	387	228.6	205.9	261
Gujarat	18.24	32.58	59.54	46.03	27.86	105.3	369.1	196	223.4	275.8
Haryana	16.9	25.3	57.4	27.96	22.77	56.21	355.6	189.5	188	261
Himachal Pradesh	18.74	30.59	65.51	0	27.16	71.33	321.7	145.2	199.3	232.6
Jammu and Kashmir	12.91	40	68.97	0	29.29	92.55	379.5	181.8	297.2	256.2
Jharkhand	34	60.52	98.18	71.93	50.62	107	407.7	238.1	234	303.6
Karnataka	16.61	37.39	90.9	56.78	30.53	61.23	379.4	210.7	244.8	276.3
Kerala	17.04	58.53	116.8	92.9	45.03	57.6	380.3	216	227	276.7
Madhya Pradesh	18.59	41.7	71.86	95.62	33.79	91.37	366.8	168.3	223.9	266.5
Maharashtra	16.2	36.02	80.78	56.52	29.5	73.34	357.8	200	217.8	268
Manipur	17.36	63.67	107	44.95	43	66.59	368.3	179.4	288.3	244.2
Meghalaya	41.86	45.09	54.95	160.3	45.11	99.9	364.1	176.7	252	237
Mizoram	38.83	67.65	72.72	108.2	60.62	97.03	418.2	186.1	273.9	335.9
Nagaland	43.12	55.31	132.5	158.9	52.62	102.5	339	234	290	243.9
Odisha	17.28	41.3	100	75.68	34.42	83.55	396.5	190.9	227.1	295.4
Punjab	15.18	36.43	51.14	69.59	28.39	88.91	412.7	185.5	310.9	300.1
Rajasthan	15.8	30.81	77.71	79.34	25.99	80.57	350.3	175.2	234.3	258.6
Sikkim	47.73	60.45	81.98	120.8	56.78	86.4	356.4	256.5	202.3	269.5
Tamil Nadu	15.84	36.2	93.19	53.1	30.47	48.8	325.1	183.6	179.7	234.6
Telangana	15.56	34.22	87.05	81.11	28.59	49.46	307.4	169.6	227	229.6
Tripura	19.27	76.06	147.1	128.5	56.87	64.45	436.4	222.9	258.8	316.5
Uttar Pradesh	21.73	42.29	77.99	66.75	34.49	116	384.5	184.6	238.6	280.8
Uttarakhand	26.53	71.89	137.6	55.34	54.39	89.38	388.8	186.9	435	292.1
West Bengal	19.2	51.21	94.84	91.14	40.61	52.32	415.2	220.3	246.4	309.4

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