

Recognition of Unpaid Care Work in the context of Urbanised Women

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Unpaid care work immensely contributes towards the socio-economic growth and development of national human resources. Sustainability of the active participation of the labour force in the day-to-day life depends greatly on the output of the unpaid care work (Kabeer, 2016). Unpaid care work generates around 9 per cent share of global GDP, which figures nearly to US\$ 11 trillion of purchasing power parity. The valuation of unpaid care and domestic work is estimated to be nearly 40 percent of GDP in terms of hourly minimum wage (ILO, 2018).

Most of the unpaid care work is directly associated with the female population throughout the globe. Men have rarely been involved in the household activities except for a handful that are mostly from the highly educated population. However, their involvement is mostly confined to indirect care work which are non-routine in nature like shopping, house repairs, utility etc. while the time involved in direct care work specifically, childcare, healthcare etc. remains low in general (Kan et al., 2011). The critical role of care is performed predominantly by women, be it as healthcare worker or informal care providers in the families (Wenham et al., 2020). Internationally, the time coverage of unpaid care work performed by women has decreased by 10 minutes while that of men has seen a rise by only 13 minutes and still women are spending more time on such work compared to the men (Dugarova, 2020).

Unpaid care work envelops a wide array of activities ranging from cleaning, fuel and water, caring for children and elderly, health care and other domestic chores including voluntary work. However, in the current research, unpaid care work is concerned with unpaid domestic work only, and not unpaid voluntary works. This paper concentrates on the issue of recognition of unpaid domestic work in the urban social structure. The present study tries to examine whether there is any need to provide recognition to unpaid domestic care work in the urban area. A focus group discussion was conducted between employed women professionals to explore the need for recognizing unpaid care work from the perspective of the participants. Each employed women will have their own subjective interpretations of situations and factors in their providing of domestic care work and thereby their requirement for recognition for

the same. As such, the recognition of unpaid care work can appropriately be studied using a qualitative framework. The purpose of the qualitative study is to develop a deeper understanding of the need to recognise the unpaid domestic work performed by women. Participants were chosen from the service industry representative of the four sectors under study, namely, higher education, banking, legal professionals, and hospitality using purposive sampling technique. A total of 12 participants were chosen to participate in the focus group discussion since using fewer than 20 participants during a qualitative research study generates better results (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The responses from the focused group discussion led to the emergence of the major themes which could be associated with the need for recognition of unpaid domestic care work.

Work Productivity & Clarity in Role

The restructuring of unpaid care work in the household rests on three crucial elements, which include (i) employment status of parents (who amongst the parents receive remuneration for their work); (ii) working settings of parents (if flexible working settings are permissible with option for work from home by the father); and (iii) mother's nature of job (if providing essential services). The father's participation in unpaid care work tends to increase in case, they opt for work from home or have lost their job, if only temporarily, due to flexible arrangements and hence availability for performing childcare and household responsibilities. However, irrespective of mothers' employment status and working environment, they continue to perform more unpaid care and domestic work (Dugarova, 2020). Care policies, especially in countries like Norway, Mexico and New Zealand (Charmes, 2019) have significantly improved the redistribution of unpaid care work in the past decade. Particularly, incentives for fathers to take parental leave have been quite effective in this aspect (Dugarova, 2018; Esquivel and Kaufmann, 2017; Heintz, 2015).

The women participants agreed that a large chunk of their day gets involved with performing the domestic work which is unpaid, thus leaving less time for their professional work. Compromising on their work load is a common feature, either in domestic work or in their professional work. Managing both sets is tiring and less productive. Value recognition to their unpaid domestic work performed will provide them with financial independence. Majority of the participants mentioned that financial liberty will make good their performance

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of the domestic work and thereby bring in efficiency and more productivity. They can have the alternative to either opt for performing domestic work for the betterment of family and also secure themselves financially or perform their professional duties and engage paid care worker for domestic chores. This will result in better productivity of their efforts and labour. A significant factor that would foster the value recognition of the unpaid care work is the clarity of role relating to performance of the domestic chores. This would demarcate the responsibilities of household activity as every job domestic in nature would be measured and thereby get associated with the individual members of the household. Consequently, the burden would be reduced thereby provisioning ample free time for devoting to their professional work life. Adding value to the unpaid domestic work will not only boost the morale but also enable members of the household to be self-dependent. This will undoubtedly magnify their performance in the professional sphere. Reducing the unpaid care work is basically, shifting the responsibility of reproductive labour from women individual (Das, 2019). This will lead to redistribution of the workload between men and women.

COVID Scenario

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the ‘crisis of care’ as quoted by Nancy Fraser (Fraser, 2016), on which rests the foundation of not only the social structure including households and society but also the economy and functionality of institutions. The on-going COVID pandemic has been a revealing factor for all the participants and their household members in terms of the significance of the women when it comes to domestic work. Further, efforts were made by the family members actively for reducing their household chores. The curfew and lockdown imposed by the government made scarce the paid domestic help which the participants were used to. The sudden change in scenario brought the realisation of recognising the value of domestic work which still remains devalued. It is simply taken for granted. The male counterparts have started sharing the burden of household care work due to lockdowns and curfews etc., which have denied them access to paid care services of cleaning, cooking etc. especially in the urban areas.

Framing up Legislative Policies

The problem of unpaid care work is that it occupies a large portion of the day yet is not even considered as performing any work and the burden of such work falls solely on the shoulders of women. Legislative policies on unpaid care work should be founded on three R’s namely, Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution. Recognition represents admitting unpaid care work as ‘work’ which is ‘productive’ and an ‘economic activity’. The value of paid care work is comparatively less as domestic care work is not considered to be work.

Reduction implies reducing the burden of women in the domestic chores. Redistribution refers to the sharing of different components of unpaid care work among different parties (Budlender & Moussie, 2013). For example, bringing up a child is usually associated with women; but redistribution can be made by making both maternity and paternity leave accessible so that the work may be shared. Various studies in different economies have suggested the use of the three R’s in provision of care allowance and citizens wages, pension systems designed in a way to recognize unpaid work as contribution, provision of social security to unpaid care givers and exemption from social security contributions for those employed in care work, provision and designing of health and educational services as well as provision of community based services (Razavi, 2007).

The recognition of unpaid work can unfold in three ways:

- i. Recognition as an economic activity in collection of statistical information
- ii. Provision of social security to unpaid care workers
- iii. Recognizing drudgery of unpaid care work and the unilateral load on women.

The participants opined that unless the domestic duties are identified as activities as a part of labour force providing value recognition to unpaid care work is unachievable. It needs to be recognised as an economic activity while collection of statistical information on a national basis. The impact of unpaid domestic work on the functioning of every individual towards their professional sphere needs to be stressed upon. The current status of the Indian legislation as discussed by the participants indicates the underlying need for recognition of unpaid domestic work. This would give an impetus to the social and economic structure leading to betterment of human life as a whole.

Conclusion

Unpaid care work is very crucial to the progression of national economic growth and development as it provides for overall well-being at the domestic level. The need for recognition of such care work stems from understanding its impact at the household domestic level. Women are the key players in shouldering the responsibilities of domestic care work especially in India. Value recognition to this component at the national level will give an impetus to these activities and secure the players from being overburdened and ultimately result in redistribution of the work load. The role of government will play a significant role in providing value recognition to the unpaid care workers by sensitizing the masses about the importance of such care work. Different schemes and initiatives of both

financial and non-financial nature will help shape up the pre-set mentality of the social structure. COVID has further accelerated in understanding the importance and burden of unpaid domestic care work among the household members, thereby providing a spark to bring about the change in social pattern for introduction of recognising the value for such work. Unpaid care work includes all those activities which enable the individual to perform efficiently at their professional sphere, hence, identifying it as an active component in the labour force by marking it as an economic indicator will contribute to the effective performance of unpaid care work. However, further work in this context needs to be carried on concentrating on the issues of gender gap, devising of specific tools for value measurement, existence of various government initiatives, impact on productivity in quantitative terms amongst others to conceptualize the recognition of unpaid care work as an active economic indicator in the economic sphere.

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