

**A discussion that took place on the e-group Jivika and Livelihoods on two approaches to whether the labour of love is unpaid labour or not.**

The perspective of cleanliness, health and overall well being is what mother's instill in their children and is generally in the realm of unpaid or lowly paid work. When otherwise, males step in . This apart the whole approach to life and living changes when both man and woman contribute - may not be equally but on equal terms in a world where division of labour is the order of the day but the concept of equal pay for equal work is not.

regards

Viren

.....

.....

Dear All,

This is another interesting article on the same topic, much closer to the perspective raised by me.

***'Women around the world spend an average of four hours and twenty-five minutes per day on unpaid care work, while men spend an average of one hour and twenty-three minutes per day on the same kind of work. This was the finding of an International Labour Organisation (ILO) [study](#) from 2018.'***

regards

Viren

**What You Call Love Is Unpaid Work: The Twelfth Newsletter (2021)**



Ailén Possamay, *Domestic disobedience / What they call love is unpaid labour*,  
Concepción, Chile, 2019

Dear friends,

Greetings from the desk of the [Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research](#).

Women around the world spend an average of four hours and twenty-five minutes per day on unpaid care work, while men spend an average of one hour and twenty-three minutes per day on the same kind of work. This was the finding of an International Labour Organisation (ILO) [study](#) from 2018. What is care work? The ILO study defines care work as ‘consisting of activities and relations involved in meeting the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of adults and children, old and young, frail and able-bodied’.

There are two main kinds of care work, as described by the ILO. The first is characterised by direct care activities (sometimes referred to as ‘nurturing’ or ‘relational’ care), such as ‘feeding a baby, nursing a sick partner, helping an older person to take a bath, carrying out health check-ups, or teaching young children’. The second is characterised by indirect care activities, ‘which do not entail face-to-face personal care, such as cleaning, cooking, doing the laundry and other household maintenance tasks (sometimes referred to as “non-

relational care” or “household work”), that provide the preconditions for personal caregiving’. Direct and indirect care work operate in tandem, the physical and emotional labour that holds together the fabric of society.



‘We move the world, we stop it’, an intervention that took place during the 8M March based on a photograph taken of comrades from the Movement of Excluded Workers, La Plata, Argentina. Colectivo Wacha

Women and girls, the ILO study shows, carry out three quarters of the unpaid care work that is required to maintain families and society. If those who perform unpaid care work received the minimum wage in their respective countries, the wage bill would amount to US\$11 trillion (or up to roughly [15%](#) of global Gross Domestic Product, the size of the total digital economy). The necessity of this unpaid care work – including taking care of children and the elderly – has prevented women, and some men, from entering the paid workforce. In 2018, according to the ILO, 606 million women said that unpaid care work meant that they could not seek paid employment outside the home; 41 million men said the same thing.

During the pandemic, 64 million women [lost](#) their paid jobs, while most women found themselves spending more time on unpaid care work than before the Great Lockdown of 2020-21. In our [study](#) *CoronaShock and Patriarchy* (November 2020), we note that during the pandemic, ‘care work has increased exponentially, and the extra burden continues to fall on women’. It is largely women who are overseeing the education of their children, maintaining households that struggle with diminished incomes, and taking care of the elderly in times when they are most susceptible to the dangers of COVID-19. UNICEF [reports](#) that 168 million children have not been in school for almost a full year.

At the same time, many of the frontline care workers in our societies, from nurses to cleaners, are women. It is these women who find themselves being applauded as ‘essential workers’ at the same time as their working conditions deteriorate and their wages stagnate, putting them at risk of contracting the virus. Last June, in a [dossier](#) called *Health is a Political Choice*, we documented how women health workers in Argentina, Brazil, India, and South Africa are struggling to improve their working conditions and to earn enough to care for their families. Our sixteen-point list of demands that ends the dossier came out of the struggles of unions in these countries, demands that remain as fresh now as they were last June. This pandemic has uncovered and sharpened our sense of how patriarchy blocks the advance of social progress.

.....  
On Thu, Mar 25, 2021 at 3:03 PM viren Lobo <[vlobo62@gmail.com](mailto:vlobo62@gmail.com)> wrote:

Yes Depinder,

The Government and the Private Sector leave all thinking processes related to real welfare of society and overall well being to the unpaid sector.

Productivity and profits is the mantra, quality of life and discussions on the value of life is a choice people make.

Viren

.....  
On Thu 25 Mar, 2021, 13:30 Depinder Kapur, <[kapur.depinder@gmail.com](mailto:kapur.depinder@gmail.com)> wrote:

This is a good commentary on how unpaid work makes paid work and public services cheaper, thereby benefits the government and private sector.

Depinder

.....  
On Wed, Mar 24, 2021, 7:09 PM viren Lobo <[vlobo62@gmail.com](mailto:vlobo62@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dear All,

Have come face to face with the necessity of unpaid household work myself from a totally different angle and necessity have a slightly different take on this issue.

- a. The concerns articulated here are taken on board .
- b. More important than these concerns is the way this work impinges on the ability of women to engage in the market space and areas of decision making on larger social issues.

The character of this unpaid work does not merely relate to household chores and taking care of the sick and infirmed. It also relates to the nature of upbringing of children and the time spent widening the horizons of the citizens of the future. The perspective given to boys relating to the relevance and importance of household work. There is another question. Does the family spend time in collective decision making or are decisions taken by the head of the family only. These are issues which get transferred when the children come to the workplace as well. Community decision making, whether women are actively engaged in this or not. All aspects of unpaid work.

The time spent on these depends not on the market value of these as commodities, but on value placed on democratic functioning, sense of ownership and what constitutes overall well being. Such values get transferred to society too in some form or the other.

regards

Viren

.....  
On Tue, Mar 23, 2021 at 10:58 PM Rajesh Ramakrishnan <[rrajesh31@gmail.com](mailto:rrajesh31@gmail.com)> wrote:

How to treat unpaid work

Indira Hirway, The Hindu, 21 March 2021

Women everywhere [carry a disproportionately higher burden of unpaid work](#), namely, unpaid domestic services as well as unpaid care of children, the old and the disabled for their respective households. Though this work contributes to overall well-being at the household level and collectively at the national level, it is invisible in the national database and particularly in national policies.

This work is repetitive, boring and frequently drudgery — a 24-hour job without remuneration, promotions or retirement benefits. It restricts opportunities for women in the economy and in life. Women do this job not necessarily because they like it or are efficient in it, but because it is imposed on them by patriarchal norms, which are the roots of all pervasive gender inequalities. This unequal division of unpaid work between women and men is unfair and unjust and it deprives women of equal opportunities as men.

For political parties to recognise this work is a positive development, and the demand for wages for housewives has emerged from this concern. However, its implementation may create problems such as affordability of the government and calculation of the amounts. Women may

not be eager to enter the labour market. More important, these wages may confirm unpaid work as women's work only, which would deny opportunities to women in the wider world. Payment of pension to old women (60+ years) may be a better idea to compensate them for their unpaid work.

### **What the government could do**

What governments could do is recognise this unpaid work in the national database by a sound time-use survey and use the data in national policies. Also, they could relieve women's burden of unpaid work by improving technology (e.g. better fuel for cooking), better infrastructure (e.g. water at the doorstep), shifting some unpaid work to the mainstream economy (e.g. childcare, care of the disabled, and care of the chronically sick), and by making basic services (e.g. health and transportation) accessible to women. Also, they could redistribute the work between men and women by providing different incentives and disincentives to men (e.g. mandatory training of men in housework, childcare, etc.) and financial incentives for sharing housework. These measures will give free time to women and open up new opportunities to them.

### **Unpaid work and the economy**

What is critical is to understand the linkages between unpaid work and the economy. The household produces goods and services for its members, and if GDP is a measure of the total production and consumption of the economy, it has to incorporate this work by accepting the household as a sector of the economy.

At the macro level, unpaid work subsidises the private sector by providing it a generation of workers (human capital) and takes care of wear and tear of labour who are family members. The private sector would have paid much higher wages and earned lower profits in the absence of unpaid work. Unpaid work also subsidises the government by taking care of the old, sick and the disabled. The state would have spent huge amounts in the absence of unpaid work. Unpaid work is a privately produced public good which is critical for the sustenance of the mainstream economy. This work, therefore, needs to be integrated with the mainstream economy and policies. It will be up to public policies then to improve the productivity of unpaid workers, reduce their burden, and tap their potential in development, as the household could also be an important economic sector.

By excluding this work from the economy, macroeconomics shows a clear male bias. It is not surprising that many economists call economics "a wrongly conceived discipline" that is narrow, partial and truncated. There is an urgent need to expand the purview of economics not only for gender justice but mainly for moving towards a realistic economics.

*Indira Hirway is Professor of Economics, Centre for Development Alternatives*