

Economic Implications of Unpaid Domestic and Care Work of Women

Irshad Sreenthaj

Department of Economics, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Keywords: *Care work; Gender inequality; Time use survey; Sri Lanka; Unpaid domestic work*

Introduction

There is a bilateral relationship between economic growth and gender in/equality. That is, rising economic growth could potentially reduce gender inequality in terms of access to formal employment, gaps in pay, etc. Similarly, shrinking gender inequality (in terms of access to formal employment, gaps in pay, etc.) could potentially boost economic growth as well (Cuberes and Teignier, 2014). The services sector has hugely contributed to the rise in the labour force participation of women due to structural changes in the economy. Economic models estimate that the rise in service sector accounted for 44% of the increase in the hours worked by women and 11% decrease in the hours worked by men (Ngai and Petrongolo, 2013). Galor and Weil (1996) demonstrate that generally women have comparative advantage in the mental labour (brain) output whereas men have comparative advantage in the physical labour (brawn) output and therefore the rise in capital intensity of production as a result of economic growth raises the relative wage of women. Moreover, the higher wages of women and the consequent lower population growth result in greater capital per worker and higher output growth. Although gaps in gender inequality (in the labour market, political representation, and intra-household bargaining power) is faster in the developing countries compared to the developed countries in the past, it is still very high especially in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia including in Sri Lanka (Klasen and Lamanna, 2009).

The gender differences in the labour market are reflected not only in terms of access to jobs but also in terms of differences in productivity and earnings (World Bank 2012). Women who play multiple roles within households and society endure an opportunity cost for working outside the home for a wage. Thus, potential earnings and productivity are also critical factors that could affect labour force participation of women. Therefore, instead of jobs per se,

the nature and effects of jobs available to women are what would determine labour force participation by women. Gender differences in the use of time and access to inputs influence productivity and earnings of women entrepreneurs, farmers, or workers alike (World Bank, 2012).

Similarly, education per se is not going to lift women out of inequality and dis-empowerment. For example, although women are the majority who enter the public universities in Sri Lanka, the bulk of them study arts, commerce, and humanities subjects that have very low employability (and low pay) in the labour market, especially in the private sector. In spite of sustained economic growth and significant improvements in access to education of women in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia, the labour force participation rates of women in these sub-regions have been very low (26% and 35% respectively). In contrast, East Asia (65%) and Sub Saharan Africa (61%) have the highest among developing countries (World Bank, 2012).

However, in certain circumstances and senses armed conflict could transform the gender dynamics in favor of women in traditional conservative societies like Somalia. The informal sector jobs that are dominated by women world over, the unpaid household care work of women, and care economy are the key attention of economists and policymakers at this time of COVID-19 pandemic (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, and Tertilt, 2020). Although this research study was conducted prior to the pandemic and the resultant lockdown and curfew, its relevance is all the more during this time of public health emergency, viz. COVID-19 pandemic, and its aftermath.

According to recent estimation, world's women aged 15 and above are devoting 12.5 billion hours per day for care work without any remuneration and many more hours for underpaid care work (Coffey et al., 2020). In all the countries of the world, the annual unpaid care work of women aged 15 and over is estimated to be at least 10.8 trillion dollars, which is three times the size of the global technology industries (Coffey et al., 2020). The traditional measures of the economy do not account for the unpaid household and care work of women. However, unpaid household work is closely related to well-being.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to estimate the real value of the unpaid domestic care work undertaken by women in a family. The sub-objective of this research is to examine the gender division of work within households, and to highlight the caring role of women therein.

Methodology

The data of this study were collected through a questionnaire from 50 respondents through simple random sampling. The data were processed using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. The following variables were used in this study:

- Labor force participation rate: the number of people engaged in the activity divided by total sample (engaged or not).
- Mean hours spent by men and women in housework and care work activities
- The mean actor time spent in a given activity of the classification by the sample engaged (or involved) in the activity.

Although, the opportunity cost method, the replacement cost method, and input/output cost method can be used to measure the value of unpaid work, this study used replacement cost method, which measures the value of unpaid work by calculating the monetary cost of purchasing this service instead. The reported activities were coded according to the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS 2016). The Activity Categories 3 to 5 in the foregoing are unpaid household work, caregiving services and unpaid assistance to other households. However, this study considered the first two categories only; that is, the unpaid household work and the caregiving service.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research study reveal that female heads of families spend more time on unpaid care duties at home than male heads of families. The survey results also reveal that, by imputing a monetary value for the time spent on household care work, productivity and income of households and the country could be enhanced.

Figure 1 (see annex) shows the participation rates for men and women in housework and care work. Accordingly, 56.8 percent of men and 87.2 percent women reported that they were involved in household activities. Participation rates were lower for care of persons. But the largest gender disparity was recorded in household activities. Also the participation rate of women was about 17 percent greater than that of men in care work.

Figure 2 (see annex) shows the mean hours spent by men and women in housework and care work activities. The largest gender gap was seen in housework where women spent 4.9 hours more than the time spent by men on these activities (7.7 hours spent by women per day compared to 2.8 hours spent by men per day) which implies that women spent 175% more time than men in household work. Women spent 3.3 hours per day on care activities, while their male counterparts spent just 1.8 hours, indicating that women spent 83% more time on caregiving work than men.

Figure 3 (see annex) shows that women spent on average 9.7 hours per day for all unpaid work while men spent 2.7 hours; the largest gender gap was seen in unpaid domestic work (house work) where women spent 5.1 hours more than the time spent by men on these activities (6.7 hours spent by women per day compared to 1.6 hours spent by men per day).

In terms of the replacement cost method, the money value of women mean population time is 843 rupees per day while the money value of men mean population time is 107 rupees per day, and the money value of women mean actor time is 928 rupees per day while the money value of men mean actor time is 399 rupees per day.

Conclusion

Findings of this study imply that if the gap between men and women in terms of the time spent on unpaid household chores and care work could be reduced, it would increase the labour force participation of women and thereby stimulate economic growth. It is timely and imperative that both individuals and the government should be concerned about the time spent/used on unpaid care work within households and remedial action should be taken by all stakeholders.

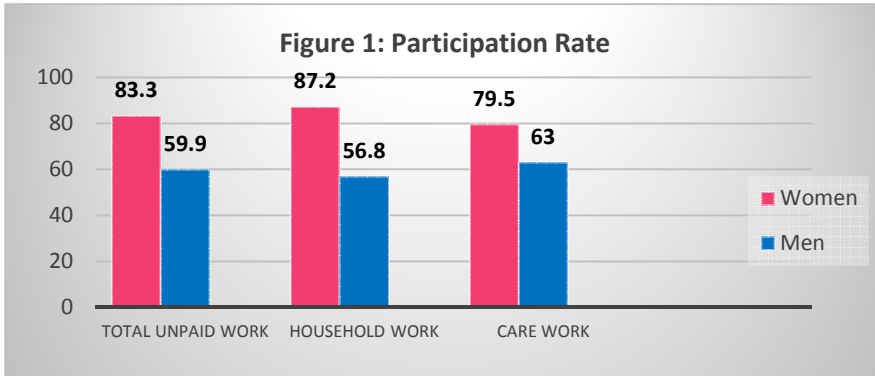
Based on the results of this research study, the following recommendations are postulated:

- A nationwide time use survey should be continually conducted on women's unpaid care work within households.
- Necessary technological innovations and introductions as well as infrastructural facilities should be made available in order to ease the burden of household chores of women.
- The government and private social welfare services should be tapped for child and elderly care work within households.
- The government should ensure that female informal sector workers are entitled to increased maternity leave provisions.
- Effective measures should be undertaken to promote equal sharing of the burden of household care work between men and women of each family.
- Increase the awareness and education among men about the imperative of gender equality for economic growth and prosperity.

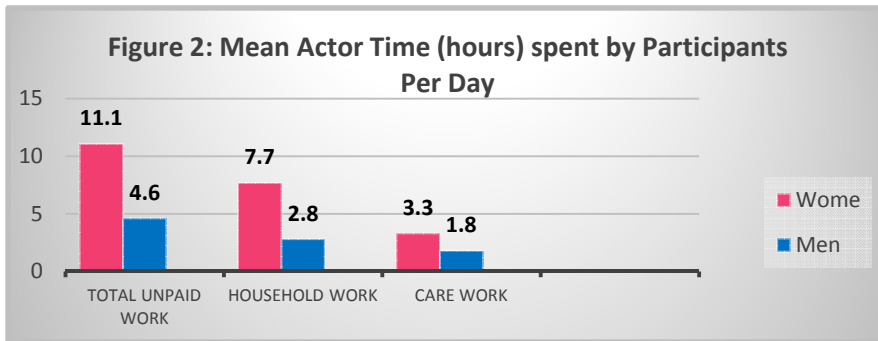
References

- Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J. and Tertilt, M. (2020), *The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender equality*. March, unpublished manuscript.
- Coffey, C., Revollo, P. E., Harvey, R., Lawson, M., Butt, A. P., Piaget, K., Sarosi, D. and Thekkudan, J. (2020), *Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis*, Oxfam Briefing Paper, January, Oxford: Oxfam International.
- David, C. and Teignier, M. (2014). Gender inequality and economic growth: A critical review. *Journal of International Development*, 26, 260-276.
- Galor, O. and Weil, D. N. (1996). The gender gap, fertility, and growth. *American Economic Review*, 85 (3), 374-387.
- Klasen, S. and Lamanna, F. (2009). The impact of gender inequality in education and employment on economic growth: New evidence for a panel of countries. *Feminist Economics*, 15 (3), 91-132.

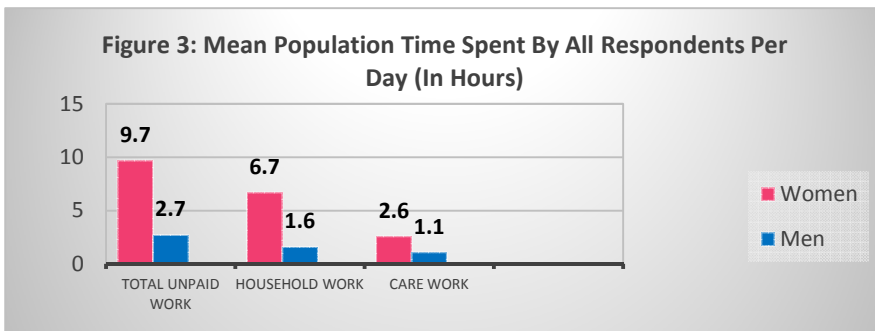
Appendix:



$$\text{Participation rate in activity} = \frac{\text{Participants in the Activity in Specified Group}}{\text{Total Population In specified Group}} \times 100$$



$$\text{Mean actor time} = \frac{\text{Total Hours spent by respondents in Specified Activity}}{\text{Total Participations in the ActivityGroup}}$$



$$\text{Mean population time} = \frac{\text{Total Hours spent by respondents in specified Group on the Specified Activity}}{\text{Total Population in Specified Groups}}$$