

SOCIAL ACTION

A Quarterly Review of Social Trends

WOMEN AT WORK: PAID OR UNPAID

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SOCIAL ACTION

Themes for forthcoming issues

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April-June 2025

(Last date to receive articles : 15 February 2025)

Caring for the Mother Earth

July-September 2025

(Last date to receive articles : 15 May 2025)

The Backbone of Indian Economy: The Farming Community

October-December 2025

(Last date to receive articles : 15 August 2025)

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Women at Work in India - Paid or Unpaid

In India, women constitute a high percentage of the country's workforce, paid or unpaid, formal or informal. In the formal sectors, women are employed in education, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, etc. In the informal sectors, women are engaged in agriculture, domestic work, street vending, etc., which mostly lack job security, benefits, and legal protections. Most household responsibilities are shouldered by women, which are unpaid domestic work, including cooking, cleaning, caregiving and child-rearing. While this work is crucial for the household economy, it is not reflected in the GDP calculations. Moreover, practically all Indian women are engaged in the task of caregiving for children, the elders, and the sick members of the family, irrespective of whether they are employed outside or not. Besides, rural women contribute significantly to agricultural activities, without direct remuneration or recognition as formal workers.

Patriarchal mindset and traditional perception of the role of women are still powerful in India. As a result, women are still expected to prioritize family responsibilities over paid work. This limits their participation in the formal sector or career development. Women who seek outside employment are hardly free from their usual domestic commitments, resulting in a double shift in their labour commitment. Women are often paid less than men for the same work, leading to economic disparity; employers show a preference for hiring men over women, particularly in male-dominated industries; women frequently encounter difficulty in advancing to senior or leadership roles. Further, sexual harassment in workplaces is prevalent in many places and the exploited women hesitate to report the abuse or attempt to abuse, for fear of retaliation.

While women, both in India and in Western countries, face challenges in the workplace, the nature and extent of these challenges differ. Western countries tend to have more supportive policies and a more inclusive culture that promotes women's employment, while India still grapples with deeply entrenched societal norms and structural barriers. However, ongoing policy reforms and societal changes in both contexts aim to improve gender equality in employment.

The government, on its part, has brought about certain legislation to promote women's participation in the labour force. These include policies like maternity leave, childcare facilities, and skill development programs to enhance women's workforce participation. Efforts are also being made to ensure gender equity in workplaces, safety, basic facilities, etc. However, there is a long way to go before anyone can claim gender equity and equal opportunities for Indian women. While there are some legal provisions to protect them in workplaces, their awareness of such provisions and their enforcement are unsatisfactory. However, there is a gradual and visible change in the perception of women's role as contributors to the economic needs of the family and the nation.

In this issue of ***Social Action***, different scholars examine the various issues and concerns related to the paid and unpaid work status of women and have come up with several suggestions and recommendations to bring about the desired changes which will recognize the valuable contributions of women to the national economy and also give them the legitimate independence and power in shaping their own lives and contributing to the growth of the nation.

Yatish Kumar and Minakshi Sardar examine the shifting narratives of unpaid care work (UCW) in India and point out that in India females have a higher participation levels in domestic work irrespective of their employment status or rural-urban divide. The study further emphasizes the urgent need for institutional recognition and the social acknowledgement of their valuable contribution to reducing deep-rooted gender-based inequalities in different spheres.

Lekshmi S. Kaimal brings out the important role the IT industry is playing in paving the way for the employment of women and calls it a paradigm shift in the field of women's employment, since this field has opened a wide range of opportunities for women including access to high-skilled roles, financial independence, and chances for innovation. This study also explores the multifaceted relationship between empowerment and constraints faced by women professionals within the IT sector, i.e., a dual reality of women's empowerment through opportunities and progress in the IT sector and constraints in their personal and professional lives due to family commitments and expectations.

MD Ali Jinna examines the complex intersection of social stratification and gender roles in determining paid and unpaid labour distribution among Indian women. The author analyses how caste, class, and rural-urban

divides impact women's participation in the labour force and the societal value assigned to their work. Further, the findings reveal that unpaid labour, particularly in caregiving and household responsibilities, limits women's social mobility and economic independence.

Momi Bhattacharya investigates the dual burden of professional and domestic work on working women in India, focusing on the impact of education on their workload and well-being. It examines the effects of work-life balance on physical, mental, and emotional health, and explores how education influences the allocation of paid and unpaid responsibilities. The key findings reveal that working women suffer from significant physical discomfort, mental health issues, and emotional strain due to balancing work and household duties.

Nidhi Kesari and Anusha Goel opine that gender biases in India are rooted in patriarchy which heavily influences unpaid female labour and as a result, women often are confined to unpaid household work and caregiving to the family. They also point out that women significantly contribute to the economy despite the lack of formal recognition. While educated women are challenging the traditional roles and colonial policies, breaking the barriers in India is not easy due to societal norms.

Ngaopunii Trichao Thomas examines the gendered division of labour practised among the Poumai community of Manipur, India. The paper describes how the original division of labour, based on patriarchy, limited men to fields, hunting, and trading and women to the domestic work of cooking, washing, and gathering food. She also points out that though women contribute a lot to the present-day economy primarily through self-employment, the culture of the society has always placed women as economically dependent and thus limited in their economic endeavours.

Shreya Jessica Dhan and Sinchani Chaudhuri explore the challenges faced by Chin women refugees from Myanmar in acquiring human capital and participating in the labour market in Delhi. The authors point out that as refugees, these women encounter substantial obstacles to their professional development and workforce engagement, which frequently leads them to seek employment in the informal sectors.

Veda Yumnam, Sandeep Singh and Sandhali Pathak study the contributions of Home-Based Workers (HBWs) in the supply of affordable goods and services, contributing to domestic and global value chains. The paper examines the lived experiences and working conditions of such

women HBWs and their lives in selected low-income settlements of Delhi.

They also point out that the earnings amongst the women HBWs are among the lowest, while sometimes, even their earnings are not regulated and even guaranteed, as they face exploitation in the hands of the contractors and sub-contractors.

These findings of the authors should serve as an eye-opener calling for a change in the patriarchal mindset and the discriminatory traditions prevailing in Indian society. By way of suggestions, the following can be proposed for serious consideration and action by those in positions of power and authority:

- 1) Ensuring gender equality in the labour market requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the structural, cultural, and policy-related barriers.
- 2) Addressing these challenges requires policy reforms, organizational changes, cultural shifts, and increased awareness to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment for women.
- 3) Including women's labour in economic metrics is crucial for achieving gender equality, and informed policymaking.
- 4) Achieving a balanced approach to paid work and unpaid domestic work is essential to fostering gender equality and improving overall well-being, acknowledging the critical role women play in sustaining economies and societies.
- 5) By integrating these approaches, societies can create an environment where both paid work and unpaid domestic work are valued and balanced, leading to greater gender equality, well-being, and productivity.
- 6) Improving the conditions for women in the informal sector is crucial for their empowerment and economic development, which in turn contributes to the overall growth of the economy.
- 7) By adopting a comprehensive strategy, governments, businesses, and society can work together to create a more equitable labour market where both women and men have equal opportunities to succeed and thrive.□

Sebasti L. Raj SJ

Shifting Narratives and the Burden of Unpaid Work among Women in India

Yatish Kumar* & Minakshi Sardar**

Abstract

This paper examines the shifting narratives of unpaid care work (UCW) in India, especially among women. Indian society is still gripped by the patriarchal framework, a deeply entrenched system that significantly influences power dynamics within residential premises or outside. This paper utilizes the data from various rounds of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) between the period of 2019-20 to 2021-22 and India Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills. Results from empirical analysis indicate that in India, females have a higher participation level in domestic work irrespective of their employment status or rural-urban divide. Unpaid care work socio-culturally linked to women's identity limits their value as productive individuals. The study emphasizes the urgent need for institutional recognition and the social acknowledgement of their valuable contribution to reducing deep-rooted gender-based inequalities in different spheres.

Keywords: Employment, Domestic, Gender, Power-Structure and Unpaid Care Work

Introduction

Unpaid care work (UCW), historically associated with "women-centric", "unpaid care work" remains socially and economically underrated. "Unpaid work" includes all non-remunerated work and activities within or outside the household and lacks social recognition (Antonopoulos, 2009). In UCW, the duration and nature of the workforce usually depend on various factors such as age, gender, religion, marital status, type of household structure and household economic situation. This paper aims to examine the gender patterns of unpaid care in Indian households. Hirway (2015) highlighted the essential definitional criteria in which unpaid work, "which is the work that does not receive direct remuneration, includes unpaid work that falls within the production boundary of the System of National Account (SNA) and unpaid work that falls within the general production boundary but outside the production boundary (non-SNA)".

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In other words, Folbre (2006) defines "unpaid care work" as work done, primarily by women, to care for family members: cooking, cleaning, and shopping, as well as care for children, the sick, and the elderly. The authors further explain that based on "time-use survey data in 64 countries (representing 66.9 per cent of the world's working-age population) show that 16.4 billion hours are spent in unpaid care work every day". Women dedicate, on an average, 3.2 times higher involvement to UCW than men (Charmes, 2019). According to Folbre, while "direct care work" has been characterized by a high level of an intimate, personal relationship between the caregiver and the receiver, "indirect care work" has been characterized by a lesser degree of personal intimacy between the caregiver and receiver. Another category mentioned by Folbre includes "supervisory care" or "passive care", which refers to child care or any caring for dependent adults while simultaneously doing household work (Folbre, 2018a, 2018b).

In several developed societies, women often work in caregiving professions, including child care, elder care, nursing, and teaching. These roles typically offer lower wages than other jobs with similar characteristics (England et al., 2002). More specifically, women in low- and middle-income countries devote more time to unpaid work than women in high-income countries (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). To alleviate instances of gender-based inequality, violence, and discrimination across different sectors, institutional interventions are vital. In the wake of women's studies, women's UCW is a well-established agenda, with sustainable development goals (SDGs) on gender equality-5. While progressing at the core of the feminist approach, the concept of unpaid care has still not received considerable attention. The idea of UCW continues to be primarily excluded from women's political agendas (Rao, 2018), perceived as low value and invisible in mainstream economics (Seedat & Rondon, 2021); keeping unpaid domestic and care work out of 'commercial activities' (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020).

In this paper, the authors explain that there have been shifts in defining the scope of paid and unpaid workforce in the last several decades, and it is unevenly distributed between males and females (Falth & Blackden, 2009). In the Indian context, a patriarchal mindset is one of the key factors that drive the prevalence of UCW among women. Consequently, UCW and domestic chores are predominantly assigned to women. The proximity of unpaid work among women is profoundly crucial for family survival; it's a matter of grave concern and affects all dimensions of development (Falth & Blackden, 2009).

Understanding Unpaid Care Work

The concept of unpaid work needs to be understood in the context of an individual's location and position in paid work through various channels. In a broader context, UCW refers to "childcare, eldercare, and care of the sick and permanently ill". Rania Antonopoulos points out two major challenges attached to the terminology in defining "unpaid care work". Firstly, the understanding that unpaid care is giving care services to those who cannot take care of themselves, like too young, aged or sick persons. However, daily care services include preparing food and cleaning clothes for all members of the family. Second, while the period used in unpaid work has posed challenges to women but also the activities and the nature of their work are equally vital in understanding that households vary in the utilization of time and unpaid care (Antonopoulos, 2009). The idea of household chores has often been linked to the private sphere, and market or politics is linked to the idea of the public sphere, with women highly viewed to be performing works related to the private sphere and men to the public sphere. Care work includes broader aspects of both direct and indirect UCW. Scholarships have redefined care work to "delineate it from the category of domestic labour" (Moos, 2021:90). Interestingly "a most striking and well-known feature of unpaid work is that women, as compared to men, perform it disproportionately in developing and developed countries alike" (Antonopoulos, 2009:3). Studies show that among married couples in families, the women spent two times more time for bringing up a child than men (Sayer et al., 2004).

The conceptual framework of the United Nations System of National Accounts of 1993 (SNA), measures and classifies economic activities, and has identified some of the unpaid work activities under "economic work" while classifying other unpaid work as "non-economic" activities. SNA categorizes several unpaid works that fall outside its production boundary as "non-economic". These include primarily household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing, and taking care of infants, children, and sick or unwell persons. The SNA identifies these activities as contributing to society, not the economy. Feminist approaches critique the popular narrative that unpaid care does not contribute to economic activities. According to Feminist economists, the household has been traditionally the basic unit to supply labour to business sectors in exchange for money. The functions performed by women at the household level play a crucial role at the macro-economic level. The disproportionate distribution of labour results in women being more engaged in household activities and limits their scope in economic

and political activities (Antonopoulos, 2009; Kabeer, 2021). The gendered narrative that perceives men as the primary source of financial stability for their families also leads to cognitive fallacies, which devalues the contribution of women's care works (Tripathi et al., 2022).

Categorisation and Components of Unpaid Care Work

According to ILO, "Unpaid care work" can be classified into three broad themes, namely, "unpaid domestic services" for the household members; "unpaid direct caregiving services" to household members; and "unpaid volunteer and community services" (ILO, 2018). The first component, unpaid domestic services, is also referred to as indirect care work. These activities do not take into consideration any direct, intimate relationship between the caregiver and the receiver. The unpaid community services include care services given to other family members. The activities under "direct care work" require intensive labour involving care and nurturing that involves affective and cognitive aspects. However, "indirect care work" can be easily reduced owing to technological assistance rather than manual labour (Hensman, 2011:16). For example, reducing workload by using washing machines. However, such mechanized work facilities that reduce human labour also raise the question of what section of the population can afford such mechanized facilities. This also highlights the stark difference between the rich and the poor societies, particularly the rural and the urban households, and its impact on care work (Sahu, 2023).

Conceptual framework

England's devaluation perspectives provide a framework for understanding the subject. It identifies unpaid care work as undervalued and very weakly recognized in society as being attached to gender, class, or race. The responsibility of caregiving has been strongly linked to women of colour, lower caste and low socio-economic status in different societies (Romero & Peerez, 2015).

Feminists in the 1960s observed that the time spent by women in their domestic activities was mainly work and not leisure. Particularly, Marxist feminists during the 1970s have highlighted the challenges to unpaid care work by referring to it as "housework", "domestic labour" or "reproductive labour" (Berik & Konger, 2021:6). They critically argued that while women in the domestic sphere mainly served the men, women also helped in the sustenance of the economy through the reproductive roles. Several Feminist economists attempted to include the domestic labour of women into the mainstream economic domain and make an assessment of domestic labour

as work in comparison to paid work (Dalla & James, 1975; Harrison, 1973). Such an assessment would help to give recognition and give due value to women's contribution to domestic activities and highlight the economic challenges faced by women. While such claims lost much credibility during the 1980s, the issue of unpaid care became a core aspect of scholarly debates and discussions. Reid (1934) defined the scope of "unpaid care work" through the application of the "third party criterion". It includes those activities that any third person can do. From a devaluation lens, female-dominated work, including caretaking activities, has often been devalued as activities like taking care have been predominantly attached to the identity of women (England & Folbre, 1999; England et al., 2002; England, 2005:383).

J. Matthaei (2001) points out that the sexual division of labour, which refers to the division of work between the male and female, can be explained through three stages. The first stage refers to gender polarization, which particularly assigned paid work to men and unpaid work to women (Hartmann, 1976). The second stage refers to gender freedom, which is characterized by women's engagement in paid work and also unpaid work. The third stage refers to gender integration, in which both males and females aspire to integrate both monetary and non-monetary work (Williams, 2001).

Plato's notion of 'female bears and the male begets' captures the normative gender-based conception that defines particular roles identified with men and women in the family. Women have been identified as caregivers as the female sex has been traditionally perceived as being better equipped by nature to nurture and give care within families. Similarly, men have been perceived as better suited than women to rule. Hence, the normative understanding of predefined roles assigned to men and women in society has always confined women to the private sphere, as caregivers and homemakers in the family, while men were engaged more in the public sphere (Busby, 2011).

Joan Scott (1986) argues that gender relations may have variations from one culture to the other; however, since gender relations have been unequal in almost every culture, it has been a structural phenomenon. It reflects or symbolizes the power relationship. The second wave of the feminist movement popularized the slogan 'personal is political', highlighting the deeply rooted socio-political inequalities between men and women. The socio-cultural norm reflects how the structural power hierarchy defines

particular roles for men and women, with women always being viewed as subordinate to men throughout all societies. Ann Tickner's perspective on the prevalence of gendered perceptions in the sphere of security concerns in International Relations highlights how the notion of 'masculinity' and gender discrimination have been integral to security in international relations behind the facade of neutrality and objectivity, ignoring the contribution and presence of women (Tickner, 1997).

Busby argues that normative beliefs of women being the primary caregiver or homemaker and men as the breadwinner in the family have been "entrenched in our psyches" to such an extent that they "inform our individual and collective actions and enable our unquestioning acceptance of rules and institutions founded on discriminatory criteria which exist at all levels of society". Busby further points out that "male dominance in the public sphere, particularly within political institutions, has led to the furtherance of male interests and a corresponding adherence to the status quo in unpaid care arrangements" despite several changes brought about in family formations and market participation in industrialized societies (Busby, 2011:6).

England points out that advanced societies have been characterized by a rise in groups of single mothers and women taking care of their children. Further, women who spend time bringing up their children are devoid of any economic self-support or have not been voluntarily supported by their husbands or the child's father. Instead, they have been state-aided or have received state-directed child support (England, 2005:383). Care works allow the scope to enhance cognitive skills, at the same time, it helps the recipient of care to develop certain skills and habits that would be beneficial for the self and also for others. Care services facilitate the individual development of both its direct and indirect receivers (England & Folbre, 2000).

The Marxist Feminists claimed during the 1970s that those taking care of the households, the homemakers, were also exploited by the capitalist mode of production as their care services towards their husbands and children made the existing generation and the forthcoming generation more productive. More productiveness would lead to making more profits, and in that way, the capitalist would be extracting the surplus value from it. The Marxist Feminist approach views all people in society as the indirect beneficiaries of unpaid labour or care. This approach claims "that care work, more than other kinds of work, produces public goods as "care work

involves a higher ratio of investment in capabilities than the production of items immediately consumed” (England, 2005:383).

Bhattacharya (2017) points out the question asked by Social Reproduction Theory: “If workers’ labour produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the workers?”. While the Marxist theory places human production and reproduction in the context of the economy and commodity production, the SRT upholds a wholistic idea of society, questions the very idea of production and reproduction and emphasizes human labour in society. According to Bhattacharya, the material necessities to produce the worker, including housing, food, intellectual development or activities to enhance physical or mental growth, fall beyond the scope of the capitalist commodification process. For this simple reason, the capitalist idea has been driven by the accumulation of wealth and not by the worker’s overall social development in society (Bhattacharya, 2017:1-2)

Database Structure and Methodology

To accomplish the objectives, this study meticulously analyzes data from various rounds of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and India Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills. One of the key objectives of this paper is to comprehensively study the extent of unpaid care work in India, examining the socio-economic and cultural forces that define its functions, allocation, and effects on individuals, households and societies. The purpose of the study is as follows: a) To identify the measures and theories of UCW and address its inequalities; b) To explore the factors of UCW that affect women’s autonomy and sustainability in Indian communities; and c) To examine how the low socio-economic profile and cultural practices compelled women to participate in UCW and other domestic responsibilities.

Empirical Findings

Both unpaid care and household chores hold financial and emotional components that encompass beyond all boundaries of paid as well as unpaid metrics (Daly & Lewis, 1998). While taking personal care of one’s household and the needs of the family members may be out of love, sometimes it might also include sorrows and suffering. Unpaid Care is deeply rooted in the patriarchal hierarchy in societies, particularly in India.

The gender representation of males being the breadwinners and women being the caregivers limits the scope of human potential. Such identifications and the ideal type of role assigned to them also restrict the progress of

women in society, which in a way normalizes or at least perceives the unpaid labour and caregiving nature of women as natural.

A vital aspect of unpaid work, being perceived and socially normalized as part of women’s daily lives, does not receive any social recognition. Unpaid work has no financial remuneration, limiting the scope to voice against decision-making. Several societies, particularly the patriarchal, perceive unpaid work as a part of the natural work for women in the family as their private sphere, making unpaid care devoid of its socio-cultural and economic dimensions.

Table 1: Shift in Employment Status (UPSS, aged 15+), Pre-and Post-pandemic, 2019–22 (millions)

Activity	Employed persons				Additional employment		
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Regular employment	115.6	120.3	121.9	118.1	4.7	1.6	-3.8
Regular formal employment	47.5	48.7	52.4	51.6	1.2	3.7	-0.8
Regular informal employment	68.1	71.6	69.5	66.5	3.5	-2.1	-3
Casual worker	109.9	116.2	119.4	122.2	6.3	3.2	2.8
Self-employed	241.1	268.5	293.3	304.1	27.4	24.8	10.8
Own-account worker	170.1	179.3	193.5	195.5	9.2	14.2	2
Employer	10.7	11	11.3	13.9	0.3	0.3	2.6
Unpaid family worker	60.3	78.2	88.5	94.8	17.9	10.3	6.3
Total	823.3	893.8	949.8	966.7	70.5	56	16.9

Source: Computed from the PLFS, 2019-2022 and India Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills

The data in Table 1 highlights the changes in the employment profile (UPSS, aged15+) during the pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic. About 823.3 million workers were engaged in different capacities in 2019, which increased to 893.8 million in 2020, 949.8 million in 2021 and 966.7 million in 2022. The majority of workers was engaged as self-employed, followed by own-account workers, regular employment, and casual workers. We should note that the share of unpaid family workers has shown a consistent upward trend from 2019 to 2022. Conversely, declining trends have been observed in both regular formal and informal employment between 2021-2022.

Table 2: Self-employment Profile (UPSS): Based on Gender and Urban-Rural Spaces, 2019 -2021 (millions)

Employment structure (aged above 15 years)	Male	Female	Rural	Urban	Total
2019					
Own-account worker	146	24.1	125.9	44.2	170.1
Employer	9.9	0.8	4.8	5.9	10.7
Unpaid family worker	26.6	33.7	52.3	8	60.3
Self-employed	182.5	58.1	183	58.1	241.1
2021					
Own-account worker	158.9	34.6	142	51.5	193.5
Employer	10.6	0.7	5.8	5.5	11.3
Unpaid family worker	33.6	54.9	78	10.5	88.5
Self-employed	203.1	90.2	225.8	67.5	293.3

Source: Computed from the PLFS, 2019-2021 and India Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills

The data in Table 2, highlights a comprehensive analysis of the self-employment profile of individuals of fifteen years and above age group based on their gender and the rural-urban divide, between the timeframe of 2019 and 2021. It reveals that in all sectors, the proportion of male workers was consistently higher than that of their female counterparts from 2019 to 2022, with the exception of unpaid family workers. The sector-wise distribution of workers is also noteworthy, with a more significant proportion of workers engaged in various informal activities in rural than urban areas.

Table 3: Profile of Various Gender-based Activities, between 2000 and 2022

Activity Status	Male											
	Youth						Adults					
	2000	2012	2019	2020	2021	2022	2000	2012	2019	2020	2021	2022
Employed	69.6	59.8	48.6	50.9	52.3	53.5	89.8	89.9	84.4	85.8	86.2	85.5
Un-employed	4.5	3.8	10.2	9.1	7.8	7.7	0.4	0.3	1.2	0.9	0.9	0.9
Student	22.5	34.3	38.8	37.1	37.5	36.9	0.1	0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0
Domestic duties	0.5	0.5	0.6	1.2	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.9	0.9	0.8	1
Others	2.8	1.6	1.9	1.7	1.4	1.4	9.4	9.4	13.4	12.3	12.1	12.6

Activity Status	Female											
Em- ployed	32.8	22.8	13.3	17.5	18.5	19.1	42	35.2	28.8	34.8	38.2	38.4
Unem- ployed	1.5	1.6	2.9	3	2.6	2.6	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3
Student	13.8	25.4	31.1	30.8	32.6	32.4	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0
Domestic duties	50.1	49.3	51.5	47.5	45.3	45.1	47.8	55.7	59.6	53.8	50.9	50.8
Others	1.8	0.9	1.3	1.1	1	0.8	10	8.9	11.1	10.9	10.4	10.4

Source: Employment and Unemployment Survey data, Periodic Labour Force Survey data and Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills.

The data presented in Table 3 illustrates the distribution of workers' activities across various sectors, categorized by gender. The analysis reveals that 84-89 per cent of adult males are employed and actively participating in different economic activities. In addition, only 0.3 per cent are unemployed, and just 0.4 per cent are involved in domestic duties. This low percentage of male involvement highlights the need for a shift in domestic responsibilities. In contrast, female workers account for a varying range between 30 and 40 per cent of the workforce while around 47 to 60 per cent of women are engaged in unpaid domestic duties.

Table: 4 Employment Status of Self-Employment: Rural/Urban Location, and Gender, 2022

Employment	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	Youth								
Own-account worker	40.2	25.4	35.2	57.1	60	57.8	43.1	29.7	38.7
Employer	1.6	0.5	1.2	5	0.9	3.9	2.1	0.6	1.6
Unpaid family worker	58.3	74.1	63.6	37.9	39.1	38.2	54.8	69.8	59.6
Employment	Adult								
Own-account worker	86.6	39.1	69.6	79.8	67.3	77	85.1	42.7	71
Employer	5.5	1.1	3.9	14.2	2.4	11.6	7.4	1.2	5.4
Unpaid family worker	7.9	59.9	26.5	6	30.2	11.4	7.5	56.1	23.6

Source: Computed from the PLFS, 2022 and India Employment Report 2024: Youth employment, education and skills

Table 4 illustrates the employment status of self-employed individuals, categorised by location and gender. The findings reveal that approximately 71.0 per cent of workers are engaged in ‘own account’ activities, which refers to self-employment without hiring employees, 5.4 per cent are employing others, and 23.6 per cent are participating in UCW. The observations suggest a pressing need for gender equality in unpaid work, as evidenced by the significant disparity between youth and adult workers in unpaid family work. Below 10 per cent of adult males are engaged in unpaid family duties, while a higher proportion of women in rural areas undertake these responsibilities than their urban counterparts.

Findings and Observations

Unpaid care is an essential component of human existence. However, it often goes unrecognized, undervalued and taken for granted. Unpaid care work has a very high prevalence, particularly in South Asian countries (UN Women, 2015). In South Asia, on an average estimate, women are engaged in 7.7 hours of daily unpaid care work (UN ESCAP, 2019), and, on average, women’s unpaid care is estimated to be seven times greater than that of men (UNDP, 2015). However, there have been quantitative and qualitative variations among countries in the required contribution of unpaid work based on various determinants. First, the economic development level; second, state welfare policies; third, the availability of quality assets and time for engagement in subsistence SNA market and household production; and fourth, the availability and the quality of assets that people can access while engaging in non-economic household productions.

The findings of the study suggest that women consistently show higher participation in unpaid family work (UFW) than males (see Table 2). Further, while both male and female involvement in UFW has increased from 2019 to 2021, there has been a higher gap in increase for women than for males (see Table 2). In the urban-rural divide, there has been a drastic difference in the share of UFW, with only 8 million and 10.5 million participating in urban areas and 52.3 million and 78 million in rural areas in 2019 and 2021 respectively (See Table 2).

The data indicates that women, irrespective of belonging to a youth group or adult, have a higher percentage of carrying out domestic duties compared to men. While men’s participation in domestic work of both groups varies between 0.3 percent to 1.2 percent; women’s participation in domestic duties from both age groups ranges between 45.3 percent to 53.8 percent (See Table 3). This reflects the stark disparity between males and females

in undertaking domestic duties in both urban and rural setups (See Table 4). In the Indian context, women are compelled to take care of domestic chores because of the socio-culturally defined identity roles and functions. The deep-rooted patriarchal norms have favoured men more than women in accessing economic opportunities. The concept of unpaid care work limits the value of women as productive individuals in the family or society.□

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