

8. Women Unpaid Work – Economy

Experts are urging a national survey on women's unpaid care work, as Indian women spend nearly 5 hours daily on these tasks compared to just over 1 hour for men. This "time poverty" severely limits their economic opportunities and hinders national GDP growth.

Understanding Unpaid Care Work

Unpaid care work refers to all activities performed without any monetary compensation to maintain a household and care for its members.

Scope of Activities – It includes a wide range of tasks such as –

- 1. Childcare, supervision, and instruction.
- 2. Care for the elderly and other dependent adults.
- 3. Daily household chores like cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and gathering firewood.
- 4. Voluntary help to non-dependents and travel related to caregiving.

The Core Problem – "Time Poverty" – The substantial time dedicated to these unpaid tasks creates "time poverty" for women. This severely limits their ability to participate in paid employment, pursue education or skill development, and achieve economic independence.

The Gender Gap in Unpaid Work – A Statistical Look

Recent data starkly illustrates the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women in India.

Metric (2024 Data)	Women	Men
Time Spent on Unpaid Care Daily	299 minutes (≈5 hours)	75 minutes (≈1 hour 15 mins)
Labour Force Participation (PLFS 2023, Aged 15+)	32%	77%
Labour Force Participation (PLFS 2023, Aged 15–29)	21.4%	53%

Key Trends – Almost 84% of women engaged in unpaid work in 2024, compared to just 45% of men. The time women spend on unpaid work has increased significantly over the last five years, while the time spent by men has only seen a marginal rise.

Expert Observations and Policy Suggestions

Experts at the consultative meeting highlighted several critical points and proposed actionable steps.

The Time Poverty Trap – Long hours spent on unpaid tasks directly prevent women from acquiring new skills and accessing paid work, trapping them in a cycle of economic dependence.

Broader Economic Cost – Low female labor force participation is not just a loss for individual women; it is a significant drag on India's overall economic growth and potential.

Policy Recommendations –

Dedicated National Survey – Conduct a new, comprehensive survey titled "Changing Patterns of Time Use, 2024–25" to capture detailed data on how unpaid labor is distributed within and between households.

Integrate Findings into Economic Policy – The economic value of unpaid care work should be formally recognized and integrated into GDP calculations and national economic planning. This will support data-driven policymaking for gender budgets, labor laws, and social security.

Significance of Addressing Unpaid Work

Formally measuring and valuing unpaid care work is crucial for several reasons –

Social – It brings sharp focus to the deep-rooted gender inequality in the division of domestic labor and responsibilities.

Economic – Increasing women's participation in the paid workforce by reducing their unpaid burden can significantly boost India's GDP.

Global Alignment – It aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

In conclusion, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women remains a major barrier to gender equality and economic progress in India. A dedicated national survey is the essential first step toward designing policies that recognize, reduce, and redistribute this work more equitably.

Source - <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/choice-or-duty-experts-want-government-survey-to-check-on-womens-unpaid-care-work-10267482/>

