

Invisible Burden of Women

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Abstract

This paper shows the potential of time use data to bring out one more dimension of gender based discrimination which has not been circulated much in literature, that is, the invisible burden of women in doing unpaid household work. Care of infant and children, sick and elderly not only depend solely on women but they also cook food, wash utensils and cloths, clean and keep household tidy to sustain the lives of its members. These are true for all women regardless of their education, occupation and residence.

Key words: Unpaid household work of women; gender based discrimination, India.

I. Introduction

Economic and social well-being of a nation is the product of involvement of its citizens in market and non-market activities. The two are distinguished by their monetary and non-monetary contributions to the development of the nation. Gender based division of roles and responsibilities in the society and weak bargaining power in the family involve women in non-market activities than men. It is also true that throughout the history of development of a nation, mankind spent more time on non-market activities than on market activities. However, the utility of non-market activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, care for children, sick and elderly, etc., are neither accounted in GDP nor in any indicator of development. As a result, the burden of women for doing household chores and taking care of children, sick and elderly remains unaccounted.

Ignorance of invisible burden of women is the main cause of discrimination against them and inequity in education, health, nutrition, and access to and control over resources. Economists have accepted for long that monetary value of final consumption gives a misleading picture of real consumption when the goods and services produced by unpaid labour of household members are excluded (Nordhaus & Tobin, 1972; Kende, 1975). Kuznets (1994) and Clark (1958) acknowledged that ignoring the income and wealth generated by housework introduces a bias in economic analysis. However, no significant progress has been made particularly in India to measure and quantify the invisible burden of women despite the fact that the country is a party to international commitments to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for women (Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing, 1995) and that women's rights are human rights (World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, 1993). This paper recognizes time as the scarcest resource for economic empowerment of women and makes an attempt to provide crucial policy inputs for improving their situation in India.

This paper is divided into five sections. Section II outlines the procedure of measurement of burden of non-market activities and describes the data used. Section III brings out the burden of women for unpaid household work. Section IV is on the benefit and consumption of product of

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such activities by co-residence household members. To conclude in Section V policy implications of the findings are highlighted.

II. Measurement and data source

Time is a resource and like any other resource it is not equally distributed among household members. Use of time spent is ideal for measurement of invisible burden of non-market activities, particularly for developing countries where gender based division of roles and responsibilities are still in vogue. Time spent in market and non-market activities is also important for the reason that a significant part of survival of poor households is through home production. To measure time spent in non-market household activities which are productive, the “third party” criteria of Hill (1979) is now widely used. According to it, the following household activities are regarded as productive: cooking, washing, cleaning, laundering, shopping, repair and maintenance of dwellings, care for infants, children, sick and elderly in the household, gardening and pet care, the reason being someone could have been hired on payment to perform these activities. On the other hand, watching television, sleeping, reading and personal care are not productive activities as they cannot be performed by a third party. This study is based on the analysis of time spent in non-market unpaid household activities which are productive.

From the standpoint of gender analysis, time diary method does better than the traditional ways in which labour supply is measured (Juster and Stafford, 1991). In the traditional methods respondents report “conventional” number of hours resulting in spikes at 40 hours per week of work. In the time diary survey, no activity is likely to be missed out since respondents were asked to report activities they performed in the last 24 hours. The only time use survey in India was conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO, 1998-99). The instrument used is time diary of members of sampled household members aged 6 years and above. The survey covered 18,591 households from six representative states of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya. In the past, these data have been used for estimation of workforce participation rates (Pandey, 2001) and for assessment of employment and unemployment situation (Hirway, 2002). The present study uses the same data to bring out the potential of time use survey for deriving key policy inputs for monitoring of gender sensitive public programmes, gender budgeting and advancement of women in India.

III. Burden of women

In view of low literacy, low skill and gender division of roles and responsibilities in the society, often women have to be confined to do unpaid household works which are, in fact, productive from the point of view of third party criteria. This is reflected in the average hours spent in paid market and unpaid household works shown in Figure 1 for males and females. Burden of women is evident from the fact that on an average women spent 31.5 hours a week in doing unpaid household work as against just three hours by men. Though men were more engaged in paid market work than women, 31.7 hours versus 14.4 hours per week on the average, women spent 45.9 hours a week collectively for paid market and unpaid household works. Figure 2 shows average weekly time spent in paid market and unpaid household work by men and women who do paid market work. Even working women spent considerable time of 28.8 hours per week on an average in doing unpaid household work which is not the case for working men. The existence of strong gender division of roles and responsibilities and, fewer opportunities for work outside home for women are thus evident from this analysis.

Having noticed that in Indian context there exists considerable gender differential in performing unpaid household work more by women than by men, it is necessary to single out the kind of activities. Figure 3 shows disaggregation of time spent in unpaid household work by major activities. Performing cooking related activities is the major burden of women requiring to spend 17.2 hours per week on an average which is more than half of the total time spent by women in a week for unpaid household work. Next unpaid household work for which women spent 4.8 hours

per week on an average is for cleaning which includes washing utensils, laundering and other household up keeping activities. Considerable time of women, 3.5 hours per week on an average, goes for the care of children in the household. Care for the sick and elderly share a negligible proportion of unpaid household work by women spending about quarter of an hour per week on an average. By contrast, men hardly spent time on these activities putting the burden on women for all the unpaid household work.

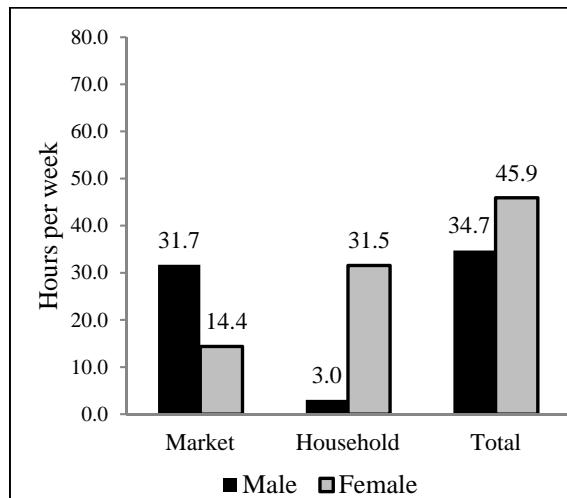


Figure 1: Time spent in market and household work by men and women

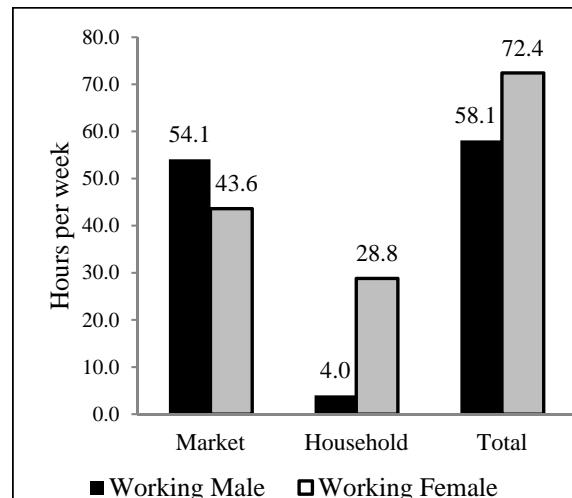


Figure 2: Time spent in market and household work by working men and women

Roles and responsibilities are not only induced by gender but also vary by age of individuals. For instance, younger women would be engaged more in cooking than older women. Support system, particularly for child care, care for sick and elderly, is also an important factor governing allocation of time by individuals. Children and elderly rely on filial and inter-generational support in India largely due to the lack of institutional support and this is captured in Figure 4 shown below.

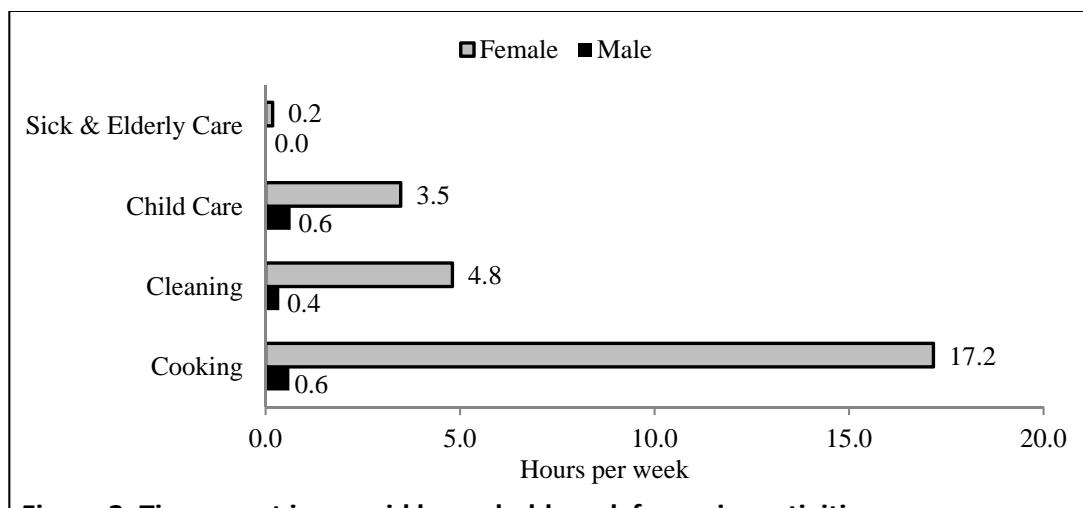


Figure 3: Time spent in unpaid household work for major activities

A huge gender gap in time spent for care of infants, children, sick and elderly is noticed, women outdoing men throughout the lifecycle. As kids, they take care of siblings and continue till adolescent age. Then time needed particularly for child care increases as they enter reproductive age group showing a peak at about 25 years (the prime age of childbearing), then declines with the crossing of peak age of child-bearing and second hump of time spent for care of sick and elderly appears at about 65 years, which could be that of their own spouse. Men's contribution in the care

of household members in terms of their time contribution is insignificant. The message emerging from the results so far is that households put the entire burden of unpaid work on women and men's contribution is engagement in paid market work only.

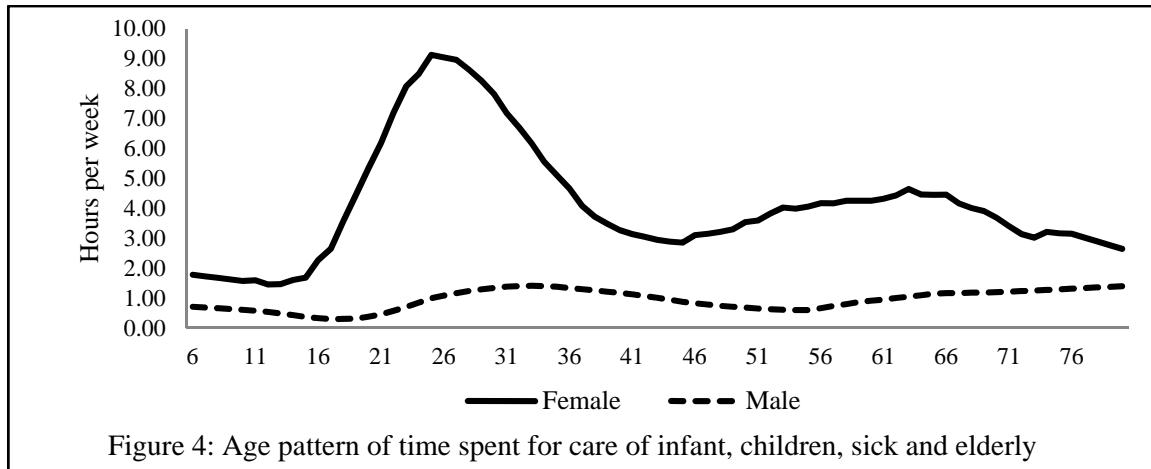


Figure 4: Age pattern of time spent for care of infant, children, sick and elderly

Gender gap in time spent on paid and unpaid activities by age are shown in Table 1. It is noticed that men in the prime working age groups spent a considerable time around 30 hours a week for primary and secondary production activities which have monetary returns. Women's engagements in these paid works are much less than men as their time goes largely for doing unpaid household work. Women in prime age of 20-49 years spent more than 38 hours, that is, 22 per cent of the total time available in a week for cooking, cleaning, washing, laundering and household maintenance when men hardly devote 3 hours a week for such household work. As noted in time spent by women for the care of infant and children, sick and elderly peaks during the child-bearing age and for women in 20-34 years it is as high as 8 hours per week on an average. Boys in 6-19 years' group spent more time in studying, i.e., about 34 hours a week as against about 30 hours for girls in the same age group. Other activities include time for sleeping, personal care, eating, pet care, doing nothing, travel for work, marketing, and care of children, sick and elderly. No significant gender differential is noticed for time spent on these activities except that time spent increases with advancing age, mainly due to time required for personal care at old age.

Table 1: Time spent in paid and unpaid activities in hours per week by age and sex										
Sex	Males					Females				
Activity/ Age	6-19	20-34	35-49	50-64	65+	6-19	20-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Primary production Activities	9.24	29.06	32.25	31.73	19.84	7.20	16.71	21.27	18.74	8.17
Secondary production activities	6.27	28.52	29.56	20.72	7.73	2.80	4.74	5.77	4.33	1.42
Household work*	1.40	2.21	2.35	2.78	2.50	12.76	39.85	38.11	27.69	15.43
Care of children, sick and elderly	0.48	1.10	1.13	0.73	1.36	1.70	8.13	3.44	4.07	3.77
Community services	0.05	0.12	0.13	0.19	0.14	0.17	0.07	0.07	0.12	0.22
Learning	33.80	2.13	0.10	0.09	0.01	29.33	0.90	0.12	0.08	0.02
Social and cultural activities, mass media	19.87	8.23	6.20	7.23	8.40	16.89	6.32	6.20	5.83	5.65
Others	96.9	96.6	96.3	104.5	128.0	97.1	91.3	93.0	107.1	133.3
Total	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0

Household work*: Cooking, cleaning, washing, laundering, household maintenance.

IV. Beneficiaries of women's unpaid work

Household members gained benefit in their daily life from the time spent by other members. Thus, time use has inter-generational sharing provision in that beneficiaries are all members of households. In this section inter-generational transfer of time which helps to sustain the daily lives of household members is discussed. This is based on simplified assumptions in the absence of details about who used the services of unpaid household work in the data source. The assumption made in the analysis is equal allocation. Example of the targeted beneficiary is time spent on infant care by any household member that is equally distributed to all infants in the household. For some services such as cleaning household, everyone in the household get equal benefits. Inter-generational time transfer on these simplified assumptions is shown below in Figure 5.

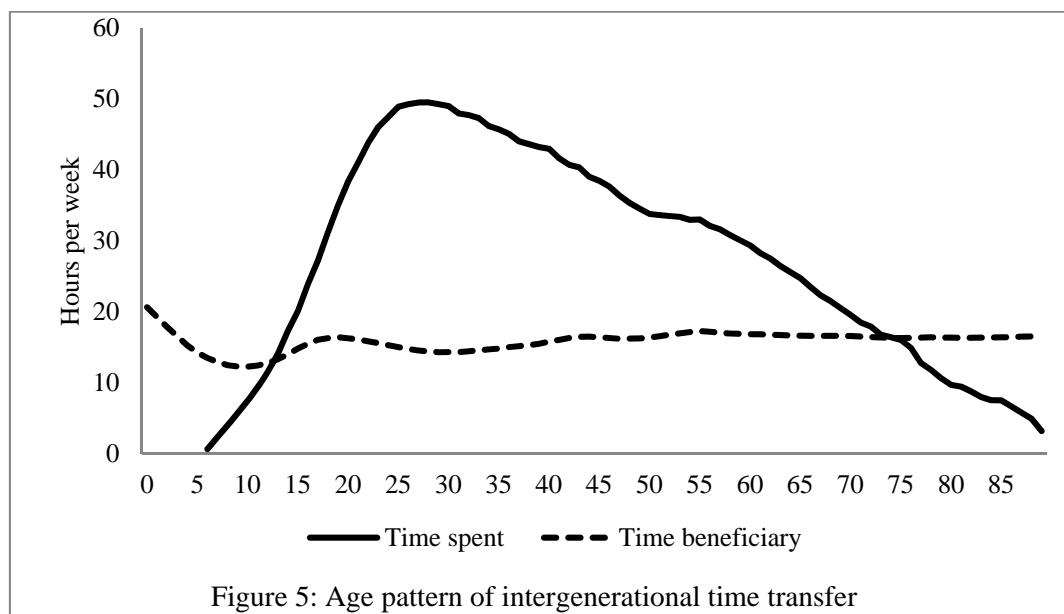


Figure 5: Age pattern of intergenerational time transfer

Two distinct features emerge from the age pattern of inter-generational time transfer, i.e., first, time spent in unpaid work by members of households is not only for self but also for the benefit other members of the household and adults in prime age spent more time in unpaid work, particularly by women as noted in the preceding discussion. Secondly, children and old members get benefits from the unpaid work of other household members without being able to contribute in household work. Throughout the lifecycle across age everyone gets benefit from the unpaid household work, particularly from women.

The number of hours of services and cares benefited by men and women from the unpaid works of household members are shown in Figure 6 for selected services and cares. The point to be noted is that while most of the burden of unpaid work in the households was provided by women, there is no significant gender difference when it comes to getting benefits from unpaid services and cares. The maximum time benefit from inter-generational time transfer is on cooking, preparation and serving of food spending more than 8 hours in a week on an average, followed by more than two and half hours per week on cleaning and tidying of households and about two hours a week for the care of infants and children. The benefit for care of sick and elderly is about 30 minutes a day. The strong fact emerging from the benefit of inter-generational time transfer for cooking, cleaning, care for infant and children, sick and elderly from the unpaid work of women in particular goes unnoticed.

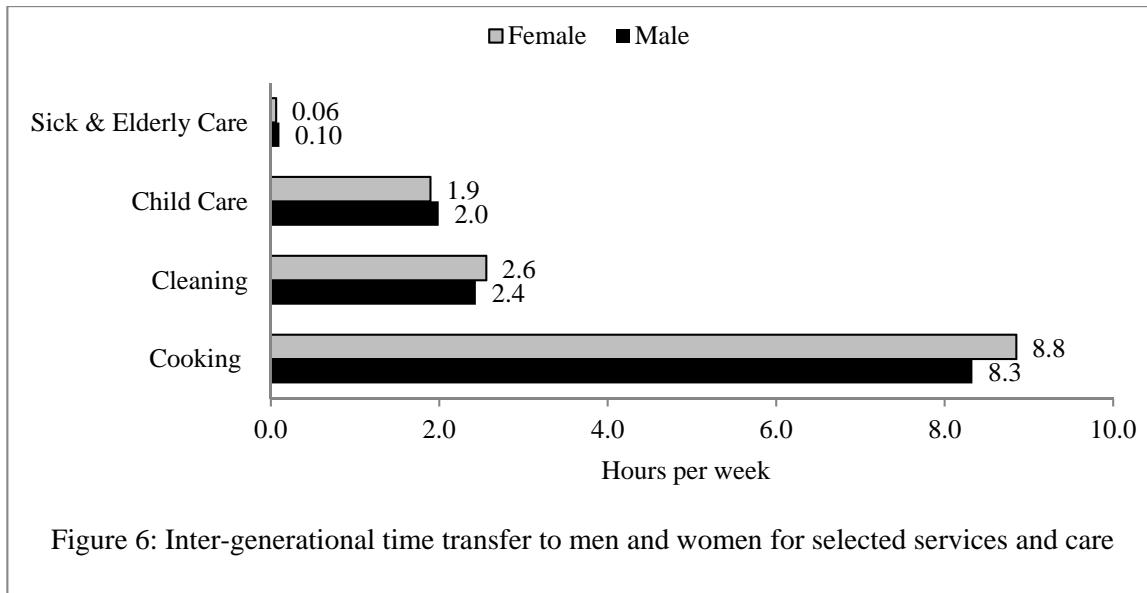


Figure 6: Inter-generational time transfer to men and women for selected services and care

It is important from the consideration of care provider the age of individuals who contributes most for care of children and sick and also age distribution of beneficiaries of such cares. The left stack bar in Figure 7 shows the share of contribution by household members of different age groups to 4.1 hours a week spent for the care of children (3.5 hours by women and 0.6 hours by men, see Figure 3). It is noted that 34.6 and 24.9 per cent of total child care time in the household are contributed by those in 15-29 and 30-44 years (the reproductive period of women). Elderly persons of 60 years and above do contribute 20.1 per cent of the total child care time reflecting the role of elderly members of households in the care of their grandchildren. Children under 15 years as well contribute 3.5 per cent of the total child care time in terms of looking after siblings.

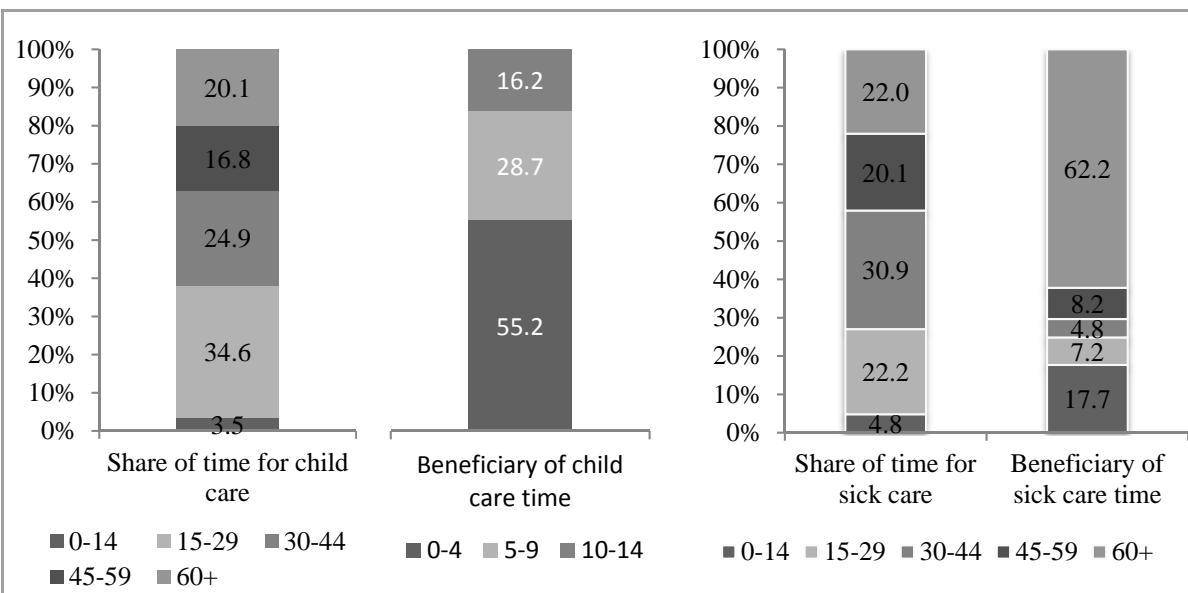


Figure 7: Intergenerational time transfer for child care

Figure 8: Intergenerational time transfer for sick care

The right stack bar of Figure 7 shows the share of benefit of child care by broad age groups. Infants and children under 5 years get 55.2 per cent of the total child care time, 28.7 and 16.2 per cent are benefited by children in 5-9 and 10-14 years respectively. In a similar manner the

left and the right bars in Figure 8 are for the contribution to the total sick care time and share of beneficiaries of inter-generational time transfer for sick care by broad age groups. Children under 15 years' contribution to the total sick care time constitute just 4.8 per cent, while the maximum contribution of 30.9 per cent is from 30-44 years' old, those in 15-29 and 45-59 years contribute 22.2 and 20.1 per cent respectively and that by elderly in 60 years plus contribute 22 per cent of the total sick care time of households. The maximum benefit of the inter-generational time transfer for sick care goes to elderly 60 years and above getting as much as 62.2 per cent of the total sick care of households and children under 15 years get benefit of 17.7 per cent of total sick care time. These results corroborate with the high morbidity rates among elderly and children.

V. Conclusions

This paper highlights the potential of time use data to bring out gender discrimination in roles and responsibilities in the households and measures the burden of women for unpaid household works. It also illustrates that traditional gender roles prevail in India, women spending more time per week than men doing unpaid household work. Men, on the other hand, spend more time for paid market work but women engaged in paid market work have the dual responsibility of doing unpaid household work unlike men. It is not an over-statement that if women do not prepare and serve food, everyone shall go to bed with empty stomach as they only spend time for cooking in the households. The age of individuals at the peak of unpaid household work time is mid-twenties which coincides with the prime age of child-bearing for women. In the absence of institutional provision for elderly and long term care of sick and care of children, inter-generational intra-household time transfer is found to be crucial for sustaining support to elderly, sick and children.

An important policy implication is that no policy can address the issue of gender equity in India unless it incorporates what goes inside the household. Two main policy implications are more employment opportunities for women and second making men to be equally responsible as care givers for bringing up children, looking after sick and elderly in the household, for reducing women's role in care giving. India can have a parenting policy not just allowing men to have few days of paid paternal leave. Implementation of some provisions of old age security including caring parents and tax benefits for caring parents can be made evidence based. Without skill building, it is not possible to increase job opportunities for women. Towards this objective, the prevailing policy of free school education can be extended to compulsory enrolment of all children from the time of birth registration. To turnaround the situation and involving men in household work, mass media can play a crucial role to educate them and women in the society.

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