

De La Salle University

Animo Repository

Center for Business Research and Development

8-2022

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development: The Challenge of Unpaid Work

Jessica Jaye Ranieses
De La Salle University, Manila

Follow this and additional works at: https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/res_cbrd



Part of the [Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ranieses, J. (2022). Gender Equality and Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development: The Challenge of Unpaid Work. *DLSU Business Notes & Briefings*, 10 (2) Retrieved from https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/res_cbrd/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Animo Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Center for Business Research and Development by an authorized administrator of Animo Repository.



Gender Equality and Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development: The Challenge of Unpaid Work

Synopsis

This article focuses on women – a sector that has been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to unpaid care work. Unpaid work refers to “all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons and housework” (Elson, 2000, as cited by Xue & McMunn, 2021) and a phenomenon that women had already been bearing significantly even prior to the pandemic. With the COVID-19 pandemic where work has shifted remotely, women have now performed multiple roles more than ever. According to the United Nations (2020), among 38 nations, the amount of time spent by women on unpaid care work activities has climbed to 33%, compared to 26% for males. Unpaid work is not only an area of concern due to its impact on women’s physical and mental health but also because of its implication for gender equality, poverty reduction, inclusive growth, and sustainable development. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have highlighted the inclusion of ‘Unpaid Care Work and Domestic Work’ as a target (target 5.4) and it is past time for the state, the market and businesses, and the most affected stakeholders to address the multiple burdens faced by the women who keep our homes together.

Written by:

Jessica Jaye Ranieses

Department of Decision Sciences and
Innovation

Ramon V. del Rosario College of Business

De La Salle University

jessica.ranieses@dlsu.edu.ph

Introduction

It has been almost two years since the COVID-19 pandemic started, which kept everyone inside their homes and forced organizations to find ways to continue operations remotely. We heard stories of both success and failure among businesses. However, the protagonists in this story are not the organizations that showed resiliency and innovation, but the unsung heroes of this pandemic—women. Prior to the pandemic, women had already been spending more time on unpaid care work compared to men, and while lockdowns also increased the time spent by husbands on doing household work, women continue to carry most of the burden (United Nations, 2020). Unpaid care work, sometimes referred to as care economy, core economy, or reproductive economy (Power, 2020) is defined as “all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons and housework” (Elson, 2000, as cited by Xue & McMunn, 2021).

The pandemic added another complexity to the type of unpaid care work both men and women are engaged in. The lockdowns did not just mean work-from-home arrangements but also schools shifting to distance learning, forcing parents to engage in activities similar to homeschooling; and as a global pandemic hit, households also had to deal with healthcare issues, especially those families living with the elderly. From the data coming from 38 countries, the United Nations reports that among the unpaid care work activities such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and household management, “33 percent of women versus 26 percent of men increased their time spent on at least three activities related to unpaid care work” (United Nations, 2020). While in the Philippines, women provide 84% of the total household time allocated to child care (Tiefenthaler 1997, as cited by This data is from 1997, and reports indicate that time spent on care work by women has increased globally and is significantly more in women than in males (Seedat & Rondon, 2021).

Even prior to the pandemic, women have already been carrying most of the burden of unpaid care work. And probably the first to articulate this phenomenon was sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her seminal work in 1989 when she coined the term “*second shift*.” The second shift refers to unpaid care work that women had to deal with after a day’s work in their paid jobs. More than an eye-opener on how women perform more unpaid work compared to men, Hochschild’s work was a call to action

towards gender equality in the United States, which at that time, according to some authors, was in a “stalled Revolution 1.0” (Blair-Loy et al., 2015). In her book, Hochschild shared the story of the 50 heterosexual couples she interviewed from 1980 to 1988 and how women talked about being “being overtired, sick, and emotionally drained” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 10). Other than this seeming impact on women’s physical and mental health, many studies done on the topic have illustrated the impact of unpaid work both on the macro-level, such as women’s careers and relationships, and also on its economic impact (see Jung & O’Brien, 2019)

A situation worsened

With the COVID-19 pandemic where work has shifted remotely, women are now performing multiple roles more than ever – their roles at work and at home in which a work-from-home arrangement would even complicate further. While the pandemic affected everyone in the world regardless of race, gender, and age, this article seeks to align itself with a more feminist perspective, focusing on the gendered dimension of the pandemic that is being highlighted in many studies accounting for gender inequality both in paid and unpaid work (Bahn et al., 2020; Farré et al., 2020). Women have been carrying most of the unpaid work during this crisis (United Nations, 2020), a burden they have carried even in the 1980s and have been first conceptualized in Hochschild’s book focusing on the “*second shift*”.

The second shift refers to unpaid care work that women engage in on top of their paid jobs. More than an eye-opener on how women perform more unpaid work compared to men, Hochschild’s work was a call to action towards gender equality in the United States which at that time, according to some authors, is in a “stalled Revolution 1.0” (Blair-Loy et al., 2015). In her book, women talked about being “being overtired, sick, and emotionally drained” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989, p. 10), and now three (3) decades after and with the pandemic, we have not progressed. In her article detailing her reflections on what it is like to live as a mother, a wife, and an academic during COVID-19, Boncori (2020) articulates that working from home due to the pandemic “feels like “the never-ending shift” (p. 681) - a reference to Hochschild’s *second shift*.

In another article, professors Couch, O’ Sullivan, and Malatzky used their own experiences to articulate how “WFH [work from home] under COVID-19 conditions intensified the demands and conflicts between

roles - academics, partners, mothers, and “family managers” - impacting their emotional realities” (Couch et al., 2021, p. 268). These additional complexities have been the reason why some scholars now claim for a “*third shift*,” referring to the emotional labor performed by women during this period and how it is undervalued and unpaid (Power, 2020). This term was first articulated in the literature by Kramarae (2001) to allude to the women who had turned to online education in order to further their careers that had been once stalled (as cited by Salcedo, 2021). In the Philippines, Salcedo (2021) contends that this third shift can be noticed and provides issues for women who must oversee their children's online learning. During the pandemic, women bore most of the burden of homeschooling and child care (Del Boca et al., 2020).

Unpaid work and gender inequality

The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work is identified to be one of the reasons why gender inequality persists (Narayan, 2017). The immense gender gaps in unpaid care work time correspond into parallel gaps in paid work time, “resulting in gender inequalities in a variety of market outcomes such as gender employment gap, horizontal and vertical gender job segregation, the gender earnings and wealth gap, and gender gaps in political representation and decision-making” (UNSG-HLPWEE 2016a and 2017 as cited by UN Women, 2018, p. 9). Female participation is lower than male because women are discouraged from looking for work due to the enormous weight of unpaid work they bear, leaving much of their work in employment and at home uncouned in labor statistics (David et al., 2018).

This phenomenon consumes far more time for women than it does for men. Due to gendered social norms that regard unpaid care work as a female privilege, women from all regions, socioeconomic classes, and cultures spend a significant portion of their day meeting the demands of their domestic and reproductive tasks on top of their paid labor, thus creating a “double burden” (Ferrant et al., 2014, p. 1). Under the human rights framework, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work progress between men and women does not only impede economic progress but is also a violation of women's rights (Carmona, 2013).

Beyond its relevance to gender equality, the care economy is also an issue that matters for socio-economic equality, poverty reduction, inclusive growth and sustainable development (UN Women, 2018a, p. 9).

Hence, it is not surprising that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have highlighted the inclusion of ‘Unpaid Care Work and Domestic Work’ as a target (target 5.4) under SDG5: “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” under SDG5. This inclusion in the agenda suggests that we are moving towards the recognition and valuation of unpaid work (Narayan, 2017). Target 5.4 states:

“Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.”

Several studies have proven that without women's empowerment and gender equality, sustainable development is unachievable (Bayeh, 2016), yet the Philippines lags behind this stream of literature and a national-level indicator for unpaid care work remains unavailable despite being a clear indicator for achieving SDG 5. Without recognition of unpaid care work, its association with well-being and gender equality will remain overlooked.

A call to action

Ferrant et al. (2014) note that despite its relevance for well-being, unpaid care work is frequently left off policy agendas due to a widespread misconception that, unlike traditional market work metrics, it is too complex to quantify and hence less important for policy (p. 1). The authors caution that disregarding unpaid care labor leads to erroneous inferences about individuals' well-being and the value of time, limiting the effectiveness of policies across a variety of socioeconomic domain.

UN Women (2018) recommends a widely-accepted framework first proposed by Professor Dianne Elson for action towards the achievement of SDG target 5.4 through the so-called ‘3-R strategy’: Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute unpaid care work. According to the framework:

- *Recognition* involves introducing policy actions on national legislation and policy coordination on the care economy, as well as collection of data on and valuation of unpaid care work, which serve to increase its visibility in the policy realm.
- *Reduction* involves the discussion of public investments in social care service infrastructure and physical infrastructure.

- Finally, *Redistribution* involves presenting labor market policies aimed at redistributing the care burden from women to men (UN Women, 2018, p. 19)

The 3R framework contends that unpaid work is an obstacle to women empowerment and that recognition is starting point to overcoming such obstacle. Recognition involves “gathering quantitative and qualitative information on the scope of unpaid work and the distribution of its burden among individuals” (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2012, p. 2). Despite the number of studies done on the topic even in developing countries such as Nigeria (see Undiyaundeye, 2013), Ethiopia (see Bayeh, 2016), and studies on a national-level (Lawal et al., 2016); studies done in the Philippine setting remain scant. While data in 2018 shows that the Philippines is improving in terms of the gender gap in education and labor force participation, “the issue of unpaid work or unpaid home care by women deserves attention and monitoring” (David et al., 2018, p. 57). “At the household level, inequitable access to assets as well as the unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work hinder women’s earning capacities and increase their vulnerability to lifelong poverty” (p. 18).

It is time that we move to the first *R* - *recognize*. David et al. (2018) advocate for “PSA to find ways to conduct a national time-use survey not only to examine unpaid work in the home but also to measure the extent of “time poverty” among women and among men” (p. 66). Literature is consistent with this methodology to value unpaid work and there have been several countries across the world and in Asia that are already providing national-level data on the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work of females as a percentage of a 24-hour day as part of their Global SDG Indicators. These are Laos, Malaysia, Korea, and Thailand amongst others (World Bank, 2022).

While the state and public policy play a crucial role in addressing the “multiple burden” (Salcedo, 2021) women are experiencing due to unpaid care work, it will take the entire society to drive revolutionary change for equality. We are experiencing a “*caregiving crisis* and sustainable public responses involving the State, the market and businesses - the stakeholders most affected - are urgently and imperatively needed” (UN Women, 2018b, p. 9).

References

- Asian Development Bank. (2013). *Gender equality in the labor market in the Philippines*.
- Bahn, K., Cohen, J., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2020). A feminist perspective on COVID-19 and the value of care work globally. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27(5), 695–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12459>
- Bayeh, E. (2016). The role of empowering women and achieving gender equality to the sustainable development of Ethiopia. *Pacific Science Review B: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 37–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psrb.2016.09.013>
- Blair-Loy, M., Hochschild, A., Pugh, A. J., Williams, J. C., & Hartmann, H. (2015). Stability and transformation in gender, work, and family: insights from the second shift for the next quarter century. *Community, Work and Family*, 18(4), 435–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2015.1080664>
- Boncori, I. (2020). The Never-ending Shift: A feminist reflection on living and organizing academic lives during the coronavirus pandemic. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27(5), 677–682. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12451>
- Carmona, M. S. (2013). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights: Unpaid Care Work and Women’s Human Rights* (Issue August).
- Couch, D. L., O’Sullivan, B., & Malatzky, C. (2021). What COVID-19 could mean for the future of “work from home”: The provocations of three women in the academy. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 28(S1), 266–275. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12548>
- David, C., Albert, J. R., & Vizmanos, J. Fl. (2018). Sustainable Development Goal 5: How Does the Philippines Fare on Gender Equality? *Philippine Institute for Development Studies*, 44. <https://www.pids.gov.ph/publications/5885>
- Del Boca, D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., & Rossi, M. (2020). Women’s and men’s work, housework and childcare, before and during COVID-19. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 18(4), 1001–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09502-1>
- Farré, L., Fawaz, Y., González, L., & Graves, J. (2020). How the COVID-10 lockdown affected gender inequality in paid and unpaid work in Spain. In *IZA Institute of Labor Economics* (Issue 13434).
- Ferrant, G., Pesando, L. M., & Nowacka, K. (2014). Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes. *OECD Development Centre*, December, 12.

- Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. Penguin Books.
- Jung, A. K., & O'Brien, K. M. (2019). The Profound Influence of Unpaid Work on Women's Lives: An Overview and Future Directions. *Journal of Career Development*, 46(2), 184–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845317734648>
- Lawal, F. A., Ayoade, O. E., & Taiwo, A. A. (2016). Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development in Africa. *3rd International Conference on African Development Issues (CU-ICADI 2016), January 2017*, 354–360.
- Narayan, L. (2017). Contextualizing Unpaid Care Work and Women Empowerment. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 3(7), 654–659. www.allresearchjournal.com
- Power, K. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families. *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy*, 16(1), 67–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561>
- Salcedo, E. (2021). Work from/for home: Recommendations to ease post-pandemic multiple burden on women. *DLSU Business Notes and Briefings*, 9(4), 1–8.
- Seedat, S., & Rondon, M. (2021). Women's wellbeing and the burden of unpaid work. *The BMJ*, 374, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1972>
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). (2012). *Quick Guide to What and How: Unpaid Care Work - Entry Points to Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute*. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/47565971.pdf>
- UN Women. (2018a). Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment: Recognizing and Investing in the Care Economy. *Issue Paper*, May. https://docs.euromedwomen.foundation/files/ermwf-documents/8098_4.193.promotingwomen'seconomicempowerment-recognizingandinvestinginthecareeconomy.pdf
- UN Women. (2018b). *Recognition, redistribution, and reduction of care work: Inspiring practices in Latin America and the Caribbean*.
- Undiyaundeye, F. (2013). The Challenges of Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development in Nigeria. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(11), 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2013.v2n11p9>
- United Nations. (2020). Whose time to care: Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19. In *UN Women Policy Brief: Gender and COVID-19*.
- World Bank. (2022). *Proportion of time spent on unpaid and and domestic care work, female (% of 24 hour day)*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.TIM.UWRK.FE?name_desc=false
- Xue, B., & McMunn, A. (2021). Gender differences in unpaid care work and psychological distress in the UK Covid-19 lockdown. *PLoS ONE*, 16(3 March), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247959>