


Economics of Care: Recognizing its Value in Social and Economic Settings

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Abstract

Care labour is the cornerstone of all societal and economic activities of the nation. It is present in the society in both paid and unpaid settings. It is a gendered job whose burden lies mostly on women as it is presumed to be their innate quality to care and caress. It is the foundation of wellbeing in a society yet the most persistently undervalued and overlooked economic activity. The present research delves into the details of care labour and its associated problems. It also considers the feministic themes on gendered nature of care labour. This study highlights the disproportionate burden of care work on women, its unpaid nature, worker's physical and emotional burnout, financial instability of the workers, lack of equipment for protection of workers, lack of recognition and acknowledgement of the work. At last, this study argues that it's not just the moral implication to recognize, value, acknowledge and redistribute care work but it is also a socio-economic need to explore its potency to the fullest and make it a strategic sector.

Keywords: Care Labour, Feminist Interpretations, Paid and unpaid work, Undervaluation of Labour.

Introduction

The history of care labour is as old as humans on this earth and has also evolved with evolution of humans and their culture, societal structures and other conditional norms. Care labour is the service rendered by a human being towards others when they are in need of care to be able to get involved in the economic activities. It is sometimes paid, when you are hiring a care labour and mostly unpaid, when it is the member of the family who is doing so. The first and the purest forms of care labour is the instinctive maternal care that perpetuate out of motherhood and include the process of nurturing the offspring and making him/her ready for the life ahead. In

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the pre-industrial era, there was informal or community-based care only where women in extended families worked as unpaid care labourers. They cared for children, sick and elderly people within the family or in association. With the inception of Industrial Revolution in the 18th to 19th century, more and more men got involved in the works of the factories and the women were expected to manage the household chores and children. This created a ‘separate sphere’ ideology which says that men and women are different, they are born for different purposes, and their roles must be assigned in this world in accordance with their gender and they must live in separate spheres of society. In the same era, the wealthier class of the society was inclined towards living a lavish life of luxuries without considering the regular chores. This is how domestic servitude came into existence. Women were hired on low wages for the purpose of nursing, baby-sitting and house helping. In the 20th century, certain western countries realized the need of implementing social programs that included healthcare and child services where they finally recognized ‘care’ as a public need. The innate nature of women being more empathetic, emotionally sensitive, altruistic tendencies, patience and tolerance made them the drivers of care economy in the whole world. But in contrast, they themselves became so much involved in the activities that they encountered health and wellbeing problems like:

Physical Health Issues

The tasks involved in care labour are mostly strenuous that take a toll on the worker's body. The tasks include lifting, bathing, assisting individuals with mobility, prolonged standing, lack of proper tools and equipment, exposure to infections, long working hours etc.

Mental Health Issues

The mental and emotional needs of caregivers is widely overlooked aspect of their job. They frequently feel burnouts and emotional strains both at workplace as well as at home due to the compelling nature of the job. They are in proximity to the families of people who are chronically ill or near to death which is a taxing task. Also, the lack of appreciation for their job is one such reason for feeling of frustration and helplessness.

Work-life Balance

They always struggle between balancing their professional and personal life. The long working hours make the job more frustrating and sacrificing. They do not get time for leisure or rest at

the workplace. Sometimes it becomes monotonous for them to do the same job for such long hours.

Literature Review

Kathleen Lynch (2007) in her research article “Love Labour as a Distinct and Non-Commodifiable Form of Care Labour” concluded that it is not at all easy to quantify or commodify the love labour that is put in as it is not a quantitative phenomenon. The paper examines the inert nature of love labouring and how can it be properly determined. The focus of love labouring lies in commitment, mutuality, trust and responsibility at its heart which is the sole demarcating feature of these kinds of labour.

Susan Himmelweit (1999) in her research article “Care Labour” concluded that care has two distinct demarcating features which is firstly the motivation to care for other people and then the activity of actually caring for them. Additionally, the quality of care depends upon the relationship between the carer and the receiver of care. In paid care labour the quality of care is not as compassionate as compared to unpaid care labour as the relationship is only mere a monetary transaction and not an act of love. Moreover, the argument ends at the note that in both forms of care labour whether paid or unpaid, it is extremely difficult to commodify them and decide a fair pay.

Eleanor K. Johnson (2015) in her research article “The business of care: the moral labour of care workers” concluded that in care labour the motivational resource in those settings is the altruism which is also the primary and the most prominent source as well. The employees at the setting in oakwood seemed to be vulnerable yet they carried it as their superpower. When other professions require less emotional quotient and more intelligent quotient this profession of care giving was a juxtaposition in this regard. They presumed that wage is not just the reward for their labour it is much more than that.

Pam Smith (2012) in his book “The Emotional Labour of Nursing Revisited: Can Nurses Still Care?” stated that an advertisement for Marie Curie Cancer Foundation showed how a nurse with extreme caution was dealing with a patient who was diagnosed with cancer and how she pardoned this news vigilantly to her family. This did not make the disease less dangerous but what it did was to summon bravery and emphasize more on the resolution of the disease and its cure rather than haunting the patient and their associates. This nursing feature is the central facility, and it is the pivot around which it all revolves.

Lopez, SH (2006) “Emotional labor and organized emotional care - Conceptualizing nursing home care work” did a qualitative study of three nursing homes where they proposed a supplementary idea of emotional care in correspondence with the emotional labour. Emotional labour and emotional care sound synonymous but there is a difference in the context that they are used in. Like the former is used as the effort that is required to manage and regulate one’s own emotions while pursuing caring professions and the later involves the genuine emotional support and compassion provided to the ones in need.

Jane Aronson and Sheila M. Smith (1996) in their research article “You're Not Just in There To Do The Work”: Depersonalizing Policies and the Exploitation of Home Care Workers' Labor” concluded that the care of fragile elderly people wholly lies on the arms of “paraprofessional home care workers”. It is a kind of highly and strictly personalized care labour that many a times seeps from formal care giving to informal and compassionate care giving and arises unpaid care activities. The paper states that although these activities arise out of compassion, but they lead to uncompensated and exploited labour.

Research Methodology

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the feministic emphasis on aspects of care labour.
2. To study the impact of undervaluation of care labour on the financial health of the Care workers.

Data Analysis

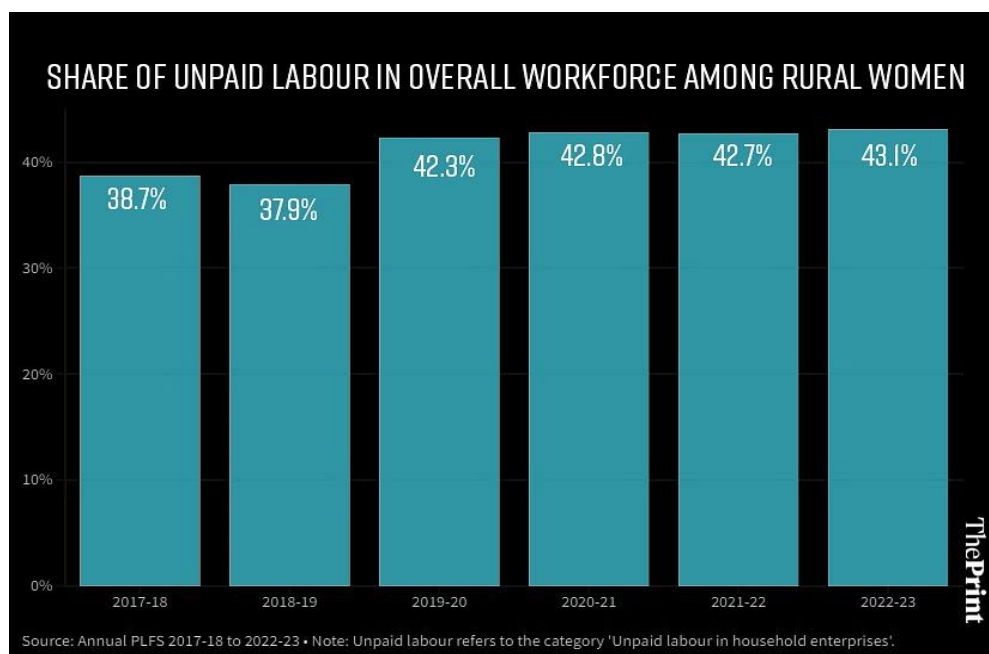
Feministic Emphasis on Themes of Care Labour

The feministic approach has always paved way for concerns of care labour as it is a profession of gendered role where women take the lead. Feminist economists have concerned every aspect of care labour from pay parity to mental exhaustion of care labour. It is not apt to say that only domestic servitude is a form of care labour instead it includes unpaid caregivers, paid professionals like nurses, teachers, childcare workers and eldercare staff, domestic workers and some social volunteers. Some themes of feminist advocacy on care labour are:

Recognition of care labour: Care labour in earlier times was supposed to be a women’s work and historically been excluded from the economic metrics and indices. Feminist scholars have critiqued the economic systems for oversighting one of the most vital components of the society

that is care-giving. It is always seen as a natural duty of the women to do these tasks. The argument behind the fact is that if it is only a women’s job then why it is understated and underestimated while it is one of the most precious acts on this earth and can only be done by a woman. It is always seen as a no-brainer activity for which women are mostly never paid or underpaid. The feminist approach recognizes this unacknowledged effort and labor of women and endeavors to seek recognition from the whole world. The figure 1 below shows how share of unpaid labour by rural women is more than men and the trend is continuously increasing.

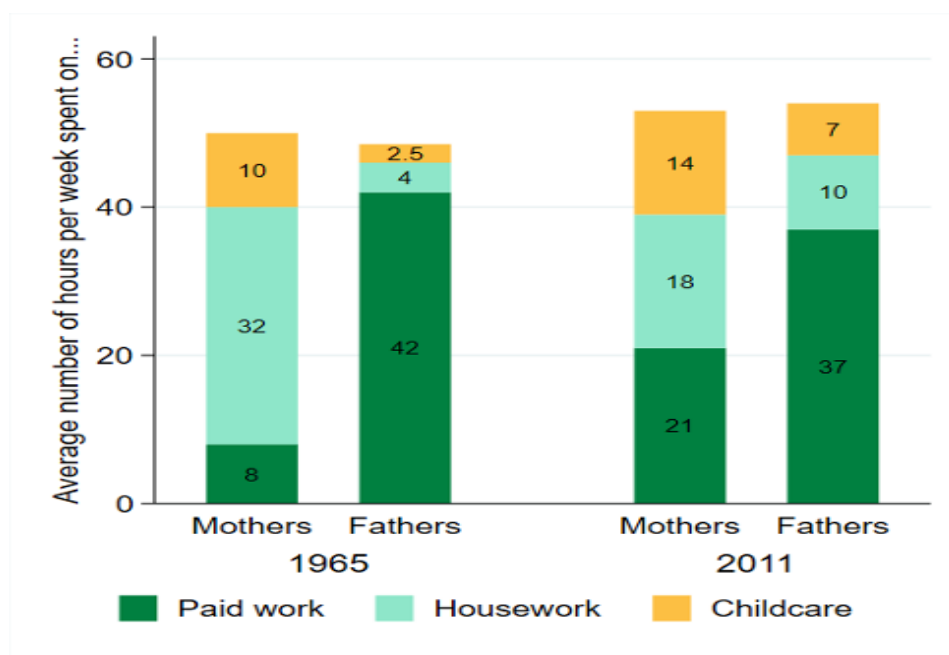
Figure 1



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey

Redistribution of care work: The theory of redistributing care labour somewhere lies with the realization of feminist economists that there is a bitter unequal division of labour when it comes to labour within households, societies and communities. The second wave of feminism in 1960s brought the attention of people towards the invisible labour that women put in which is the overlooked essence of economies. As rightly said by an activist in that era “Men are not the bread-winners, they are mere income earners. The women turn that income into bread, without which they cannot survive”. The redistribution of care work is only done at individual level and borne out of a person’s sympathetic nature but not at authority and implementation level. As per the figure 2 given below, the average time spent on paid work has increased by women but it is not the benchmark where the standards must lie.

Figure 2



Source: Free Network

Fair Compensation

According to the International Labour Organization’s data, the estimates of unpaid care labour and domestic servitude stand at around 10-40% of a country’s GDP in any year. In India, as per the PIB (Press Information Bureau) data, the estimated contribution of women’s unpaid care labour in the economy was approximately 5% of the country’s GDP in the year 2019-20.[1] Therefore, firstly there is a need to recognize it as an economic activity and then to account it properly with regards to the labour and efforts that are put in by any women or men involved in such an activity. In this matter, the feminist activists believe that care labours must be given fair pay, protection and most importantly respect for their work. The foundation of International Domestic Worker’s Federation in 2013 was the leap of faith in fighting for labour rights in domestic servitude where mostly marginalized women were employed. Although, care work is not just about domestic servitude but includes, as stated earlier, all forms of care labour.

Rights of Care Workers

Care workers whether in informal or formal settings must have the basic rights that every labour has. Firstly, they must be paid at par with their labour or efforts that they put in which is the right of pay parity or fair pay. Secondly, they must be given right to decent working conditions where they are not treated as slaves or bondage labour. Thirdly, they must get the right to

Protection from Sexual Abuse and Harassment at workplaces. They must feel protected where they work and in case of any mishappening they must have a place to report. Fourthly, the right to social safety must be ensured to them as well which includes unemployment benefits, childcare support and maternity leaves where they are allowed to rejoin their workplace. Lastly, they must have the right to Acknowledge the unpaid care labour that they put in.

Intersectionality in Care labour

Third wave of feminism that perpetuated through the intersectionalities of the society and laid emphasis on the fact that how race and class intersect with gender in care labour roles. In the western countries Black women and women from poor background were mostly seen as involved in either of the care labour acts within both paid and unpaid stratas. Also, the movement took notice of how the women in developing countries were either forced or wilfully leave their native town and serve in wealthier nations where their exploitation was much easier and created a scare out of scarcity in their native towns too. This created a care gap in their own communities.

Challenging the Love Narrative

In the overview of these movements, feminists also realized that the narrative of care giving falls on the women out of their inherent capabilities to love and vigilance, but the problematic part is the unjustifiable compensation of their service.

• Impact of undervaluation of Care labour on the financial health of the care workers

As proven in many studies that [2] the willingness of women to do the work in lesser consideration as compared to men is one of the greatest causes of underestimation and undervaluation of care work which is mostly regarded as a woman's job. According to the Figure 3 for United Nations Women's report on Forecasting Time Spent in Unpaid Care and Domestic Work [3], women spent 2.8 times more hours a day on care work than men which is 4.3 hours per day by a woman and 1.6 hours by a man on an average. In 2019, the National Sample Survey Office released a Time Use Survey where they examined several men and women and took a sample on how they spent their day i.e. the 24-hour time span. The findings of the report stated that approximately 92% of all the women surveyed undertook domestic chores at some point in the day and in contrast only 27% men did so in the whole day.

Figure 3



Source: UN Women 2016 – If unpaid family care work is taken into consideration and combined with remunerated work, women work more than men, in both northern and southern countries

These facts lead us to the conclusion that women are the drivers of the care work around the whole world therefore this needs to be accounted and monetized so that their efforts can be rewarded. Women tend to find more space in the sphere of unpaid care work if they did not get into paid workforce, for instance a housewife who decides to manage her home and nurture her children and there is no accounting process or standard to reward her for this lifetime job she chose to do. This makes her financially instable or dependent on someone else. This financial dependence makes her fragile and vulnerable to every torture and abuse from her family members. According to United Nations Fact Sheet on Violence Against Women [4] , 30% of the married women all over the world experience violence from the intimate partner at any point of the relationship that accounts for around 1 out of 3 women worldwide. The similar kind of statistics from National Family Health Survey [5] state that 32% of the married women between the age of 18-49 years have faced physical or sexual violence from the spouse. The woman becomes tolerant of every evil act when she is dependent on someone else for even the food she eats as her work is not considered as a work and she is economically weak. A women’s literacy and financial stability are the factors that drive a woman out of a bad or unhealthy marriage. In case of other paid care work that women do like domestic servitude, nursing, baby-sitting etc., as per the International Labour Organization data [6] by 2030 approximately 2.3

billion people will be in need of care which would make care work of paramount significance than ever and would emerge as a high-growth domain if recognized and revalued properly. The World Economic Forum [7] has also considered care work as a key to growth of the economy and wellbeing. According to the estimates, if care work accounted properly, it would make 9% of the global Gross Domestic Product that is around \$11 trillion. The social and economic value of care work is actually hidden and untapped right now as it makes other jobs possible and contribute to the smooth operation of the economy as it encompasses relationships and services in both paid and unpaid space therefore it must be recognized and leverage to the fullest.

Suggestions

1. Economic Valuation and Social Recognition: There is an urgent need to include care labour in the economic matrices especially the unpaid form and give them the stature that they deserve for their efforts. The economic value of care labour must be calculated to underline its contribution to the society. The stereotypes must be challenged and the stigma must be removed to liberate the society and shared roles must be encouraged across various genders.

2. Concept of Living Wages: The concept of living wages must be applied on the care labour activities as well. The living wage means a minimum wage necessary for sustenance must be ensured to every care labour irrespective of the gender and the role.

3. Social Benefits and Protection: The care labours must also get social benefits like access to healthcare, pensions, provident fund, paid maternity leave, etc. in formal and informal both settings. Also, they must not be regarded as slaves and their exploitation must be included as an offence.

4. Shared Responsibilities: With no misdemeanor, every responsibility of the household must be shared equally and if one is more involved in those activities then the person must get acknowledgement for that purpose. In official setting, men must be encouraged to get more involved in the care labour and they must be sensitized about the job they are going for.

5. Support for Health and Wellbeing: The job performed by care labours involves more mental toll than any other profession. Therefore, they must be given access to mental health services, if possible, at subsidized rates. There must be provisions for their mental and physical wellbeing.

6. Care Demand: As India is right now the country of youths and also the most populous place on this earth, therefore when 5 or 6 years hence the youth will turn into aged population, the

demand for care would be at its peak. More and more people will be in need of care which would make care a sector of potential in the country.

Conclusion

The improvisation of care labour is not just a matter of giving equivalence to genders but is also a critical investment point in both social and economic fabric of the society. Care labour, no matter how underestimated, is actually the backbone of families, society, communities and the nation as well. Care labour is the work that makes all other works possible in the economy. The first and foremost step in diving deep into the depth of care labour potency is the recognition of the labour that care workers put in. It is not just the agenda of discussions and debates but for real, a matter of concern and real implementation of practical solutions to the problem. The aging youth population of India would demand more care labour than any other nation worldwide. The calibre of care economy must be recognized and fully explored not as an ethical consideration but as the strategic sector of the economy. Investment must be done in formalizing it and training professionals for care labour roles can be prudent step in the path of progress. The best example for this can be Japan's initiative to upskill eldercare workers and provide them proper training to elevate the profession's dignity and status. Caregiving must not be done as an imposed burden on a specific gender in society but as equitably valued and shared responsibility.

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