

---

## UNIT 4 CARE ECONOMY AND FEMINIZATION OF LABOUR

---

### Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning Outcomes
- 4.3 Women in the Household
  - 4.3.1 Concept of Work
  - 4.3.2 Women and Work
- 4.4 Gender and Domestic Work: A Critical Review
- 4.5 Introduction to the Care Economy
  - 4.5.1 Concept of Care Economy
- 4.6 Women Care Providers
  - 4.6.1 Importance of Care Economy
- 4.7 Gender in Care Economy
- 4.8 Role of the care economy in the National Economy
- 4.9 Economics of Care Economy
- 4.10 Care economy within the national economy
- 4.11 Terms Used in Care Economy
- 4.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.13 Unit End Questions
- 4.14 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 4.15 References

---

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

---

This Unit familiarizes the learners with the basic concept of work at home and women's role in various capacities to make it comfortable for other family members. It dwells upon the need to quantify women's work at home and the process that can be followed for it. The Unit started defining work. After providing definition to work, we discussed 'women and work'. The Unit also critically looked into the Gender and Domestic work and Care economy. Let's start reading the Unit.

---

### 4.2 LEARNING OUTCOMES

---

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Analyze household work in economic terms;
- Highlight the role of the care economy in the household;
- Estimate the extent of women's contribution to the household care economy; and
- Estimate the contribution of the care economy to the National economy.

---

## 4.3 WOMEN IN THE HOUSEHOLD

---

This section discusses the role of women in the context of household and family. It gives an account of the various tasks performed by women within the household.

### 4.3.1 Concept of Work

To understand the nature of the care economy within the household, we must first understand the concept of work as it has been defined in an economic context.

*Work is any activity or energy expenditure that produces services and products of value to other people (Fox, 1984, p. 2).*

Work is an activity that is related to the production of goods or services.

*Work is invariably associated with production, with the manufacture of some goods or services for exchange in a market, in opposition to consumption defined as 'non-work' or 'leisure time activity' (McDowell & Pringle, 1992, p. 122).*

Based on economic connotations, work or activities are divided into two kinds:

- Economic work/activity – All those generating income are called economic activities. These are also referred to as production of goods and services.
- Non-economic work/activity – All those activities which do not give any income in return are called non-economic activities.

This division of work into economic and non-economic activities is strengthened in households and families when work is performed outside the home. It brings an income that is considered economical and, therefore, important. However, it is not necessary that work would always fetch wages, salaries or income in cash. For instance, the work that a woman performs in the household is considered non-economic despite its importance for the smooth running of the household and work as enabling factors for the husband and other members to go out, work without any household worries and fetch an income required to meet the family expenses.

Within the economic framework, the definition of work gives no cognizance to cultural and emotional work performed by women alongside work that gives them economic returns.

### 4.3.2 Women and work

The relationship between women and work is multi-layered, owing to its existence both within and outside the home. Women have traditionally been a part of the informal economy in the communities. They have been managing the household economy by taking up the responsibility of the entire household work. Their role remained active even after formal production in factories and other specialized workplaces started. So the shift was not from leisure to work but from inter-familial to employer-employee-working relations. This changed their work patterns, sharply differentiating the work into wage–non–wage or paid-unpaid work. Their formal entry into the labour market fetched their wages in cash compared to their earlier work, which fetched them no income in cash. Therefore, it has been argued that the concept of work should be broadened to include the varied types of tasks performed by women in and outside the home, either for self-consumption or exchange and as unpaid or paid labour (Delphy, 1992, p. 20).

Within the domestic sphere, work performed by women is characterized by the following:

- **Multiple nature of work** – The work scope ranges from reproductive to productive work activities, which takes women from one role to another simultaneously.
- **Enabling environment for others** – The work performed by women at home comprises basic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing, child care and looking after old and sick members of the family. It also includes looking after guests and maintaining kinship networks.
- **Invisibility** – Tasks performed by women at home are not noticed. It is assumed that the household equilibrium is maintained on its own.
- **Low status** – The household tasks are considered low since they do not fetch income.

The economics of domestic work/life, focusing on relations between household work and productive work by women, has been explained in terms of patriarchal relations and control within the household (Delphy: 1992; Walby: 1986). It is argued that housework occurs within a domestic or patriarchal mode of production in which men exploit women's labour. This argument is based on the following observations –

- 1) men gain a lot in consumption and leisure from women's household work;
- 2) while evading their share of housework and child care, men receive services for which they do not have to pay;
- 3) since the woman is not dependent, men don't have to pay; and,
- 4) The woman produces his labour power which he exchanges for a wage he controls.

In case of changes within the productive domestic relations (e.g. single woman), Walby sees them as a part of a shift from private to public patriarchy, with male control of individual women in families and households giving way to patriarchal public control: the state and labour market. This indicates the continuation and extension of patriarchal control over women's lives in a different context.

---

#### 4.4 GENDER AND DOMESTIC WORK: A CRITICAL REVIEW

---

There has been a very negative approach towards the labour of women. The planners need to pay more attention to the work done by women in the domestic sphere. The subsistence work and child care work, which is unpaid, is entirely unaccounted for. Similarly, the enormous amount of labour in the informal sector remains completely invisible.

Many scholars believe that liberal philosophies tend to devalue labour and time devoted to the biological needs of human beings. They take the time spent on domestic chores for granted. There is no value in the time spent on cooking, cleaning, nurturing children, and caring for the old and disabled, as these are not considered productive work. The domestic sphere is governed by instinct and is believed closer to nature than the social

structure. These functions are seen as the natural duties of every woman. Therefore, women are being projected as a natural caregivers. At the same time, since the work is unpaid, it devalues and is not even considered labour.

If we look at emancipating women, we must also consider restructuring the private sphere. Based on this logic, the domestic sphere has not made a matter of policy intervention. The broader implication is that we fail to understand that the limitations women face in the public arena are naturally related to their roles in the household. Many feminist scholars argue that men can behave like disembodied rational agents because they have women to care for their bodily and domestic needs. At the same time, these women lead lives of deprivation as their time is consumed in catering to their male folk. Many Marxist scholars see women’s domestic labour as the basis of capital accumulation. German Feminist, led by Maria Mies, argues that men, as well as capital, benefitted from women’s demotion to unpaid subsistence work. The present oppression, subordination and subjugation of women is the culmination of the prolonged domination of men over women, nature and colonies. For such scholars, patriarchy and capitalism are interdependent and supplementary.

Without downgrading women’s labour in the care economy, we must emphasize the need to create an alternate society based on a feminist understanding of labour.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

- Note:** i. Use this space given below to answer the question.  
ii. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. Define work in the context of gender.

.....  
.....  
.....

2. What is domestic work?

.....  
.....  
.....

---

**4.5 INTRODUCTION TO THE CARE ECONOMY**

---

This section introduces the concept of the care economy and its role in family well-being. It dwells upon the role and contribution of women to the care economy that constitutes the backbone of a family /household.

**4.5.1 Concept of the care economy**

The care economy originates at home and is deeply embedded in family welfare. The care economy is the work done, usually in the domestic sphere, which keeps the labour force fed and clothed, and raises the future labour force, ensuring that society

operates effectively. In simpler terms, it means working to ensure that other members, including children, old and sick family members, are well looked after and lead healthy lives. The idea of the care economy was developed from women's experiences, their role as consumers and as unpaid labour at home.

***The care economy represents the time spent on unpaid care for members of their households and communities. It also consists of time spent to make up for the spatial deficiencies in public infrastructure, including the health, energy, water and sanitation sectors. Such activities range from providing long-term health care to the chronically ill to fetching water and firewood (Chakraborty, Lekha S, 2006, Financial Express).***

Gilman argued that the unpaid care labour of women at home is not compensated for by the income earned by their husbands. She describes care as a primary human sphere and considers valuing the sympathy and care of a mother in market terms as unthinkable.

Economic analysis has a history of inclusion of women since the 1930s as the reasons for wage differentials between men and women to work on household production and time allocation during the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1950s, neoclassical economics pioneered the work towards a better understanding of the reasons behind women's labour force participation. The work of Jacob Mincer centred around economically analyzing the household sphere. It was an essential step towards including women's work in mainstream economics. This process was intensified in the 1960s with the work of Gary Becker and other human capital economists that built the New Home Economics. They applied market-oriented concepts and models to household production. Time allocation analysis was used to explain the sexual division of labour at home, and the inequalities within were explained through individual choices made under the assumption of utility maximization. Boserup, in 1970, pointed out the importance of women's subsistence activities in rural areas and their underestimation in national income accounting. An impetus from the international women's movement since the 1970s is the demand to emphasize and analyze all aspects of the invisibility of women's work, including domestic production.

Since the 1980s, there have been efforts to integrate gender into macroeconomics through two avenues: the inclusion of women's unpaid work in national income accounts and the shift from micro to macro issues with the perspective of gender and development. With repeated lobbying for the importance of women's work at home, there has now been consent that it is essential to value unpaid work:

- To give visibility to women's work and
- To establish women's claim on the national exchequer based on their contribution.
- To recognize the care economy as a 'productive space'.

*The following story is an excellent example of the care economy being in control of the economic process:*

***Ali, an immigrant shopkeeper in London, has a friend called Dona. Dona gets information about racists planning to attack Ali and does not know how to warn him. Complaining to the police is useless as they dismiss Dona's story as a product of paranoid fantasy. Dona knows that Ali, a business contact,***

*informs Charles about his movements. She can only warn Ali by breaking into Charles' room and leaving a message about the planned attack. Under utilitarian thinking and justice reasoning, there is no reason for breaking into Charles' room. Charles is a self-centred egoist who will be more disturbed by his room being broken into than by Ali getting beaten up. From a justice perspective, there is no justification as Ali's life is not in danger, only his health and dignity. From a practical perspective, Charles' utility will decrease, and Ali's further utility loss due to the bashing will be less than the utility gained by ten racist attackers. Does the very idea appear preposterous? If so, you value care as an end in itself. Sen encourages Dona to follow her "deeply held and resilient conviction that she must save Ali". Care is one's responsibility toward the community that one feels part of it. Without responsibility, adverse external effects will rapidly restrain the economic process, says the author Amartya Sen.*

The care economy remains significantly invisible in quantitative terms, or at best undervalued, because of the restricted definition of 'economic activity' in national income accounting. Only market-oriented activities are considered 'economic'. In this context, it is interesting to recall the famous economist Pigou's comment that if a housemaid employed by a bachelor were to marry him, national income would fall since her previously paid work would now be unpaid.

Adam Smith, the noted economist, recognized the role of the care economy at home in moulding the future labour force. He recognized that labour, like capital, is a produced factor. The type of changes in the economy affects the care economy. For instance, cuts in health budgets and the draining of capable doctors from the public to the private sector will cause longer waiting lists and clinic queues. People who cannot afford expensive healthcare need more care at home. This will mean that women have to divert more time to care at home and less to other activities.

#### 4.5.2 Women as Care Providers

The relationship between women and their role as care providers may be explained as follows:

- **Economic scenario:** The changing requirements of the macro-economy directly impact the domestic household context in the form of greater demand on women's time and resources to shape the care economy's evolution.
- **Social position and class:** The structuring of the particular role which different categories of women assume in the economy of care is clearly, a function of their broader social position, a fact which makes the arena of the care economy a terrain of complex, interlocking gender and class equations.
- **Time poverty may affect income poverty:** The public infrastructure deficit in rural areas may enhance rural poverty due to the skewed time allocation of women towards unpaid care work, which is otherwise available for income-earning market work.
- **Well-being and development:** Care (whether paid or unpaid) is crucial to human well-being and the pattern of economic development. Some analysts emphasize the significance of care for economic dynamism and growth. Others see care, in much larger terms, as part of the fabric of society and integral to

social development. Care must become a dimension of citizenship with rights equal to those attached to employment to overcome the gender bias deeply entrenched in social protection systems and make citizenship genuinely inclusive.

### 4.5.3 Importance of the care economy

There have been essential debates within feminist economics on how to conceptualize the connections between the sphere of market-based capital accumulation (the commodity economy), on the one hand, and that of non-market-based social reproduction (the unpaid care economy), on the other, while giving full recognition to the natural divisions and differences between them. This has drawn attention to the distinctions between different components constituting the unpaid economy, highlighting the care and its distinct characteristics (the difficulty of raising productivity and the associated disease cost).

There is a growing global recognition of lifting the veil of statistical invisibility of the care economy.

---

## 4.6 GENDER IN THE CARE ECONOMY

---

The magnitude of the contribution of women in the care economy is alarming. Global estimates suggest that \$ 16 trillion of global output is an invisible contribution by the care economy, and within that, \$ 11 trillion is the non-monetized, invisible contribution of women.

Women's involvement in the care economy is a continuous process as follows:

- **Composition of the family:** For all countries, having a (young) child tends to increase unpaid care work.
- **Life cycle approach:** Marriage tends to increase the amount of unpaid care work to be done by the women. With increasing age and advancing stage in life, there is a decrease in the care work performed by women.
- **Household income:** The amount of unpaid care work tends to decrease with an increase in income, while being employed tends to decrease the amount of unpaid care work done by women.

The difficulties of household welfare internal to the well-being of the family members constitute a permanent element in structuring the economy of care and the central role women play in it. However, the household is seen as a *consumer* of goods and public services rather than a *producer*, which provides valuable inputs and resources to both public and private economies. Women's contribution to the economy is mainly in this hidden area of production which includes *care work, voluntary or civil society activity, subsistence production and work in the informal sector*. This activity's invisibility means not only needs to be more accurately measured but it is also excluded from Gross National Product (GNP) and usually ignored when making policy decisions.

In India, the Time Use Survey (TUS) conducted by CSO in about 18,600 households in six selected states during July 1998-June 1999 revealed that, on average, a female spent 34.6 hours a week compared to 3.6 hours by a male in the care economy. The data reiterates the involvement of women in the smooth conduct of the care economy as it exists.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note:** i. Use this space given below to answer the question.  
ii. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. What is the care economy?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. What is the role of women in the care economy?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

---

## 4.8 TERMS USED IN THE CARE ECONOMY

---

Several terms represent the care economy. Some of them are:

### 4.8.1 Care Work

‘Carework refers, simply, to the work of caring for others, including unpaid care for family members and friends and paid care for others. Caring work includes caring for children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled and doing domestic work such as cleaning and cooking. As reproductive labour, care work is necessary for the continuation of every society. By deploying the term —care work, scholars and advocates emphasize the importance of recognizing that care is not simply a natural and uncomplicated response to those in need, but strenuous physical, mental, and emotional work, often unequally distributed through society (Meyer, 2000). Because care tends to be economically devalued, many scholars who study care work emphasize the skill required for care and the importance of valuing care.

**Source:** Misra, J. (2007). Care work. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*. Blackwell Publishing. Blackwell Reference Online. Retrieved June 13, 2007.

### 4.8.2 Caregiver

Caregiver is a generic term referring to a person, either paid or voluntary, who helps an older person with the activities of daily living, health care, financial matters, guidance, companionship and social interaction. A caregiver can provide more than one aspect of care. The term often refers to a family member or friend who aids the older person.

Family members or friends frequently provide this type of care. In the child care field, however, the term *caregiver* refers to people paid for providing child care services. (Stebbins, 2001, p. 232).



**Source:** Department of Health and Human Services. (2005). Glossary of ageing terms. Retrieved March 01, 2007, from <http://eldercare.gov/eldercare/public/resources/glossary.asp>.

Stebbins, L.F. (2001). *Work and family in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc.

### 4.8.3 Caregiving

“Caregiving is providing unpaid assistance and support to family members or acquaintances with physical, psychological, or developmental needs. Caring for others generally takes on three forms: instrumental, emotional, and informational caring. Instrumental help includes shopping for someone disabled or cleaning for an elderly parent. Caregiving also involves emotional support, including listening, counselling, and companionship. Finally, part of caring for others may be informational, such as learning how to alter the living environment of someone in the first stages of dementia.

Sociologists generally limit their discussion of caregiving to unpaid workers. Caregivers are typically family members, friends, and neighbours. Sometimes caregiving is done by those affiliated with religious institutions. While caregiving of all types is also done by paid workers such as nurses, social workers, and counsellors, this is paid work and thus is not in the same category. Caregiving rarely refers to the daily care that parents provide for their children because this is classified as parenting; however, caring for an adult disabled daughter would be considered caregiving because it is outside of the norm of expectations for older adults.” (Drentea, 2007)

**Source:** Drentea, P. (2007). Caregiving. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*. Blackwell Publishing. Blackwell Reference Online. Retrieved June 13, 2007, from <http://www.blackwellreference.com>

#### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note:** i. Use this space given below to answer the question.  
ii. Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit.

1. Why has women’s work yet to be counted in national income?

.....  
.....  
.....

2. How can women’s work be counted in the national economy?

.....  
.....  
.....

## 4.9 LET US SUM UP

Women have been mainly responsible for the running of their households. Their primary role has been to nurture the family through labour which is assumed to be there without

any monetary gains. The various tasks women perform are repetitive, monotonous and lacking in appreciation. However, their work is challenging to measure in concrete terms of their complex nature. Physical labour, emotional support and psychological care make the distinct nature of a woman's work. Against the vivid arguments for/against unpaid labour of women, it has been realized that women's domestic labour contributes not only to the household economy but also to a nation's domestic economy. Therefore, it needs to be monetized and included while calculating total economic gains at the national level.

---

## 4.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

---

1. What is the care economy? Elaborate on the role of women in the care economy.
2. Women contribute to the national income. Discuss this statement in the context of work performed by them at home.
3. Should women's domestic work be included in the national economy? Discuss.
4. Write short notes:
  - a. Women as caregivers
  - b. The gendered connotation of domestic work
  - c. The gender-sensitive national economy

---

## 4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

---

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Activities, tasks, economic return
2. Household, family, care

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Invisible work, household economy, drudgery
2. Nurturing, family sustenance, and care of the members

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. The voluntary, social role, duty, family well being
2. Methods, approach, time spent survey

---

## 4.12 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

---

Beneria, Lourdes, 2003. *Gender, Development, and Globalization: Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: Routledge

Hirway, I. (2009). 'Mainstreaming Time Use Surveys in National Statistical System in India' —*Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol xliv no 49; Mumbai; December 05.

Sidh, S., Narayan & Shramishtha Basu. (2008). *The monetization of Women's Unpaid*

Work and Time Use Survey in Gairsain Block of Garhwal Himalayas'. Uttarakhand and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Available at <http://iussp2009.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=90387>.

Palriwala, R. & Neetha Pillai. (March 2008). Analysis of the Time Use Data'. *Report*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD); Geneva, Switzerland

Chakraborty, Lekha, S. November 2005. 'Public Investment and Unpaid Work in India: Selective Evidence from Time Use Data'. *Draft Paper*, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy; New Delhi.

Devaki, Jain, (1996). 'Valuing Women's Work: Time as a Measure', *Paper*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 31, No. 43; October 26.

Hirway, Indira, 2002. Employment and Unemployment Situation in the 1990s – How good is the NSS data?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 37 (21); 2002.

Jain, Devaki, 20017. The Value of Time Use Studies in Gendering Policy and Programme', Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation, Bangalore, Karnataka.

Ghosh, Jayati, Nirmala Banerjee and Saraswati Raju., 2005. Employment-Unemployment NSS 61st Round), Report No. 518 (July 2004 - June 2005), *Report*, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Government of India; New Delhi.

Gender and Human Development, 1995, *Human Development Report*, UNDP.

Antonopoulos, R. & Indira Hirway. (2010). *Unpaid Work and the Economy: Gender, Time Use and Poverty in Developing Countries*, Palgrave Publishers; United Kingdom; January 2010.

Palriwala, Rajni & N. Neetha, June (2009). Paid Care Workers in India: Domestic Workers and Anganwadi Workers', *Report*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD); Geneva, Switzerland.

Swaminathan Padmini; 2009. 'Outside the Realm of Protective Labour Legislation: Saga of Unpaid Labour in India', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 44: No. 44.

Eapen, Mridul, (2000). Participants of Indian Women in Household Work and Other Specified Activities', 1999-2000; NSS 55th Round (July 1999-June 2000) *Report*, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, New Delhi.

Arboleda, Heidi, 2003. Valuation of Unpaid Work in Household Production and Volunteer Services', Statistics Division, UNESCAP; Bangkok, Thailand.

<http://www.unescap.org/STAT/meet/rrg3/twsa-03.pdf> (PDF; Size: 37 KB).

Hoskyns, C. & Shirin M. Rai. (2007). Recasting the Global Political Economy: Counting Women's Unpaid Work, *New Political Economy*, 1469–9923, Volume 12, Issue 3, Pages 297 – 317. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/staff/rai/npe\\_article.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/staff/rai/npe_article.pdf) (PDF; Size: 314 KB).