

The Economic Contribution of Pakistani Women through their Unpaid Labour

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Report prepared by:

Society for Alternative Media and Research and
HealthBridge

Islamabad, Pakistan, August 2008



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Acknowledgements

The Society for Alternative Media and Research (SAMAR) would like to thank those organizations which facilitated the research in the field and the research team members who put their time, energy, and effort into obtaining quality data from the field. We would also like to thank those who have contributed to this important research by agreeing to participate in our interviews. Last but not least, we would like to thank all the people who have provided their valuable technical inputs in analyzing the data and writing the report.

Summary

This report presents background information and research results from a study undertaken on the economic contribution of women through their unpaid labour in Pakistan. The purpose of the research was twofold: to gain an understanding of the nature of women’s unpaid work in both rural and urban areas, and to obtain an approximate figure of the economic worth or value of that work. For the purposes of this research, unpaid work includes those tasks performed daily by Pakistani women, including caring for others, fetching water, cleaning, cooking, and other activities for which they receive no pay.

A secondary purpose of the study was to become acquainted with women’s perceptions of their unpaid labour. The research included a survey and in-depth interviews with women in rural and urban areas that generated qualitative information that contributed to a better understanding of women’s unpaid work and the daily schedule of their lives.

It is important to mention that this report uses the terms “household work,” “housework,” and “unpaid labour” interchangeably. The terms refer to the wide range of activities

required to maintain the home and care for the family, including activities typically described as “housework” (cooking, cleaning, washing), the care of children and other family members, management of household accounting, and work around the homestead, including gardening and caring for small livestock.

A key finding of the research is that both urban and rural women perform a wide variety of tasks, typically working 16 hours a day; this work includes all major and supplemental tasks.¹ Most of the women have no leisure time and typically utilize their “spare time” to complete household activities. Through the research, it became clear that women assume most of the responsibility for household chores without a helping hand. Even when they have a servant, women typically do their own cooking and generally take complete responsibility for teaching children and helping them with schoolwork. Women recognize that their household activities have value, although they would likely be surprised at the magnitude of their economic worth.

The researchers calculated that if such household tasks as cooking, cleaning, and sewing were out-sourced, it would cost Pak. rupees 4,000/month for a single household in urban areas,

¹ An interesting finding of the research was women’s division of work into two categories: “major” and “additional” or supplemental. Major tasks are limited in nature, yet so-called additional tasks both occupy a large amount of time and have great significance for the family, including as they do such tasks as carrying water, earning money for the family, and caring for family members. In one sense these terms are misleading, but they are retained here as they reflect the perception of the women themselves (and perhaps the researchers) and suggest that other studies on women’s work may greatly underestimate women’s work by ignoring such “additional” chores.

equivalent to Pak. rupees 48,000 per year, or US\$800². For a rural household, the figure is Pak rupees 2,150/month, which is Rs. 25,800 per annum, equal to US\$430. Such generalizations fail to take into account that the typical wage rate for each task is different in different geographical areas because of varying levels of poverty and inflation, but one finding is universal: women spend most of their waking hours engaged in work of high value to families and society. The results of the research indicate that women across the country are contributing US\$37.55 billion or 23.3% of GDP.



² The exchange rate at the time this report was prepared was Rs. 60=1USD

Background

Low status of women in Pakistani society

Demographic statistics provide a snapshot of the effects of discrimination against women. The sex ratio in Pakistan was estimated in 2008 at 105 males to every 100 females (World Fact Sheet 19 June 2008) compared to a world average of 111 females to every 100 males. This is largely attributed to nutritional anaemia, which affects most females in the country largely as a result of discrimination against girls and women in the sharing of food as per the common South Asian practice of women eating after the men and children. This means that women are generally given less food and often have to make do with leftovers (The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2009 and *Of Knots and Weaves: Indian and Pakistani Women Connect Across Borders* 1996). In addition, according to Globalis³, under-5 mortality rates are far higher among females (135 deaths per 1,000 live births) than among males (121 deaths per 1,000 live births). Because of the lower resistance of their underfed bodies, women are more susceptible to potentially fatal diseases such as malaria, gastroenteritis, and respiratory diseases, particularly tuberculosis. Repeated pregnancies can also take a heavy toll on women's resistance to disease. Boys are generally better nourished than girls and have a lower prevalence of growth failure. During illness, parents incur expense to seek health care for boys more often than for girls, leading to higher mortality amongst girls.

In addition to differential feeding and caring practices is the practice of purdah, or constraints placed on women's mobility.

³ <http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/country.cfm?country=PK>

The condition of women who do not hold a wage-earning job outside the home is aggravated both physically and psychologically by their confinement within the four walls of their homes. They get little sunshine or fresh air and no recreation, while men typically face far fewer restrictions.

While the role and status of women in Pakistan is changing quite rapidly through the influence of "western" culture, traditional ideas still remain. While many women now have paid jobs outside the home, this practice is still considered odd.

Education and improvements in female school attendance

International experience has demonstrated that educated girls are more likely than uneducated ones to be knowledgeable about their rights and thus to try to exercise them. They also may be more likely to question negative assumptions and be reluctant to accept everything imposed by their family, elders, or head of the family. But such girls receive little if any support from the social environment in Pakistan. Many families are of the view that there is little benefit in continuing girls' education, as girls would be unlikely to find a decent job and in any case after marriage their earnings would not benefit their parents⁴. As soon as girls reach puberty, they typically stop going to school and their families marry them off. Even for girls with high ambitions, it is very difficult to find a decent job, so they are forced to accept household work as their sole or main occupation.

Among other criticisms the Pakistani education system faces is the gender disparity in enrolment levels. On the bright side,

⁴ As with other South Asian countries, after marriage in Pakistan women typically live with their husband's family.

some progress has been made in recent years in trying to address this problem. In 1990-91, the female to male ratio of enrolment was 0.47 for primary education. It reached 0.74 in 1999-2000, an increase of 57% within one decade. For the middle level of education it was 0.42 at the start of the decade and increased to 0.68 by the end of the decade, an improvement of almost 62%. In both cases, gender disparity decreased significantly, and relatively more rapidly at the middle level. Even so, disparity remained relatively high.

The gender disparity in enrolment in secondary education was 0.4 in 1990-91 and 0.67 in 1999-2000, for a decrease in disparity of 67%. At the college level, the figures were 0.50 in 1990-91 and 0.81 in 1999-2000, or a 64% decrease in gender disparity.

Employment status and income

The term full-time housewife refers to women who work in their own home all day without pay. Although a full-time housewife does a number of tasks at home, her work is not counted as part of the gross national product and, since it is unpaid, is not recognized in the same way that paid work is. The majority of women in Pakistan (79.4%) are labelled as housewives. While women who work outside the home receive an average salary of Rs.6,000/month, the housewife receives nothing and is considered to contribute little or nothing to her family or society; she is also not entitled to any of the benefits that come with paid employment.

Women's dependence on men

Pakistani housewives are generally dependent on the males in their families for their subsistence, due to their relatively lower educational levels and fewer formal job skills, the resulting lack of employment opportunities, and lack of

acceptance of women earning a living. Since most women have attained only low levels of formal education, they are not qualified for higher-level jobs. They are restricted both by family and societal expectations that prevent them from reaching a higher level of either education or employment.

In Pakistani society, different roles are ascribed to males and females to a greater degree than in many other cultures. It is apparent from these proscribed roles and responsibilities that males, being the head of family and custodian of their rights, enjoy more autonomy, rights, and power than do women. Men themselves decide what is right and wrong for their family members according to societal views. Men provide the basic necessities (in terms of purchases) to the family and are mainly responsible for earning a livelihood.

Virtually all the decision-making power within the home is held by men, even when it pertains to the health and well-being of women and children. Women working at home thus are dependent on their husbands or other male family members and have little or no control over their own decisions or family matters. They have virtually no decision-making power in the family. Where women do work outside the home, they are seen as contributing to the family economy and thus have some, albeit limited, decision-making power in the family, including in financial matters. Such women are typically more assertive and confident than housewives.

Methodology

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods consisting of in-depth interviews (IDIs) and a

survey. A total sample of 647 women was interviewed.⁵ The research was conducted by trained researchers working in NGOs (coordinated by SAMAR) in six rural areas of Mansehra district and in one urban area of Rawalpindi district. SPSS software was used for data analysis.

The research was made challenging by the socio-political situation of Pakistan, flooding, proclamation of a national emergency, assassination of a political leader, suicide bombings, sectarian violence, crises of the judiciary, strikes, and widespread threats to civil society by Islamic extremists.

Although the study was limited to only a small portion of the culturally diverse nation of Pakistan, this is unlikely to have a major effect on the results. Across study sites, differences were seen in the nature of tasks but not in the overall number of hours spent on work. In short, women throughout Pakistan work long days and perform many important tasks. A far larger and more “representative” study would thus have been unlikely to yield much more substantive information than was already collected.

Results

Family composition, education, formal employment

Most of the women participating in the study were aged between 20 and 39. Most (74.3%) were married and living in a nuclear family consisting of five or fewer family members (husband, wife and children). In addition to performing tasks in their homes, women also directly take part

⁵ Unlike the related research conducted in other countries, the Pakistan study did not include male interviewees.

in economic activities, whether paid or not.

One fourth of the female respondents were illiterate or only basically literate; only one in ten had higher education.

The formal employment status of interviewed women reveals that only one-fifth of the respondents held formal jobs.

Unpaid work and the typical woman's day

Pakistani women perform a range of household work that includes cooking, washing, ironing, picking up and dropping off children, collecting firewood and other fuel, fetching water, shopping for groceries, helping their family in economic activities, and assisting children with their school work.

Women often engage in more than one activity at any given time, for instance holding or feeding a baby while cooking, comforting a crying baby while helping another child with housework, or tending to the sick while washing the clothes. If each separate activity were taken into account, women's working hours would expand considerably. Meanwhile, there are many tasks which require that even full-time housewives leave the home to perform, yet which are linked to household tasks, such as buying groceries, fetching water or fuel, picking and dropping of kids at school, and paying utility bills. Ironically, having their women perform such tasks does not humiliate even those men who would feel ashamed to let their wives work outside the home for pay.

Women reported spending on average eight hours per day on “major” household tasks. Beyond the so-called major tasks (cooking, cleaning, and caring for the home), there are a range of additional or “minor” tasks which, when added to the major ones, require on average sixteen hours per day to complete.

The distinction made here between “major” and “minor” (or supplemental) work, with very different results in terms of the hours required each day, is interesting and significant. When asked about the number of hours they spent on household work, women generally neglected to mention so many tasks that they *halved* the amount of time they calculated spending on “household” work. When the actual tasks engaged in by the average woman were accounted for, it became clear that rather than working an eight-hour day at home and in related tasks, women actually spent sixteen hours doing so. This difference suggests both the ways that women themselves undervalue or discount much of the work they do (the work, ironically, being invisible even to she who performs it) and the methodological difficulty in performing this research, since when asked what work they do, women are likely to significantly understate their responsibilities and the time the work takes.

The work starts early in life and continues late, with women spending many hours per day on housework roughly from their teens into their fifties or sixties. Girls may still spend most of their time in studies and simply provide help to their mothers. Once they marry, women spend sixteen hours a day on domestic tasks until they reach the age of 60. The number of hours women work in the home grows rapidly in her twenties. From their thirties, those women who join the labour market (about 20% of women), spend on average 8-9 hours per day on household work; those who do not have a job outside the home may spend twice that amount, having the “luxury” to spend more time with children and other family members, or engaging in tasks that those working outside the home may pay others to perform or buy on the market (e.g. cooking from scratch versus buying convenience foods; tending one’s children all day versus sending them to a relative).

The average 8-16 hours of productive work per day continues until a woman reaches her early 50s. After 50, employed women who used to work for wages begin to retire, and the load of housework is reduced with the marriage of children. However, women still spend on average 8-16 hours per day — depending on what they define as work — on productive activity until they reach the age of 60.

Major discrepancies result from asking women how many hours they spend on work, as opposed to performing a calculation based on the tasks women perform, as women tend to discount much of what they do and thus arrive at a significant underestimate of the hours they spend working. This is partly due to the general prejudice that “work” involves paid labour, so that some women would say that they do not work despite spending virtually all their waking hours tending the home and family.

The typical woman’s day includes about two or three hours per day for meal preparation and an average two hours a day cleaning the house. Time spent on family care peaks for women in their 30s, with an average of one to two hours per day on pre-school child care and one hour per day on the care of school-going children. Other activities fill out a woman’s 16-hour day.

Women must also train their daughters in household work. Young girls begin learning such skills at an early age. Training of their daughters is another major task which women never count as work and which has been omitted in the calculations of the economic value of women’s work in this and other recent studies.

Typically in Pakistan, women are the first to rise in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. Half (54.7%) of

female respondents in this study get up at 5:00 a.m. to start with housework, and most are not finished with their work until late, going to sleep at 10:00 p.m. or later. Women do not have a single free day for themselves. The research results indicate that they work while other family members sleep, watch television, or are engaged in other leisure activities.

The survey revealed that almost half of the total female respondents undertook their household work alone, while a mere ten percent were helped by a maid (which in turn required supervision of the maid's work). Almost no women (0.5%) reported that they received the help and support of their husband in household tasks. Employed women, if they spent on average eight hours a day on housework, bore a further burden due to time also spent on outside work and travel to and from their paying job.

As noted above, the combination of so-called major and minor tasks add up to a sixteen-hour workday. Sixteen hours of work and up to eight hours of sleep take most of the day, indicating that women have little or no free time for leisure activities, and personal activities must be fit in around other work or through sleeping less.

Only 0.5% of women report that their husbands help with household work.

Leisure, rest, and recreation

Housewives working 16 hours per day are unlikely to find much leisure time for themselves, and even if they do avail some time it is typically spent on activities related to their home, such as sewing and embroidery, gardening, and helping children with their homework.

Almost two-thirds of female respondents reported that they

had some free time at home; the other third reported that they had no time for leisure activities. Given women's use of free time to engage in other household work, the fairly high figure reported for free time may actually be misleading. Two-thirds of respondents said that they do not get any kind of vacation from domestic work.

Rural-urban differentials in terms of hours worked

When the results of the survey were analyzed, very little difference appeared regarding the time spent on household work across the country. The major difference in terms of specific tasks carried out was between urban and rural areas. Urban women in different cities, and rural women in different villages, were seen to be engaged in somewhat similar tasks as their urban or rural counterparts, respectively. Women *everywhere* spent a large amount of time on housework, regardless of whether they also held a paying job.

The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions showed that if the hours spent on all services rendered by housewives including both "major" and "additional" tasks are added up, the amount of time spent working reaches 16-20 hours a day. The women themselves had no clear idea of the amount of time they spent time doing household chores. Women provide their free care-giving as an obligation and duty, without keeping an account or having much concept of the amount of time it takes.

Family decision-making

Reproductive health research in South Asia has considered women's involvement in decision-making to be an important aspect of their household position. The 2001 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) asked women whether they were involved in decision-making in four

areas: the kinds of food to cook each day, daily household purchases, their own health care, and large household purchases. More than 80% of DHS respondents reported deciding what food to cook either alone or in conjunction with another family member. More than 40% of women reported being involved in decisions on daily household purchases.

These data are indicative of women's influence over routine household activities. In contrast, women's participation in decisions on their own health care and on large purchases was less common. Discussion of family planning was more common among women whose husbands had a secondary or higher education (60%) than among those whose spouses had no education (42%) or only primary schooling (51%). Such differences make clear the extent to which education is important for the welfare of a country.

The findings of the present study confirm that the majority of housewives do have the opportunity to discuss important issues related to family with their husbands, but do not have significant decision-making power at home. The findings revealed that only 12% of female respondents discussed "everything" with their husband, 47% reported that they discussed only important issues, and for another 30%, the husbands decided everything on their own.

The types of issues women mentioned discussing before making a decision included childbirth — that is, whether to have more children or not, as well as where to give birth — children's education, purchasing or selling of property, spending of money, their children's marriage, and exchange of gifts with relatives.

Perceived importance of women's work

For women working for pay outside the home, both they and their family members recognize the importance of their work. Their work is recognized because they are making a direct financial contribution to the family. Meanwhile, the contributions made by women working full-time in their homes are not formally recognized. Although their work has a great importance for the survival and well-being of the family, it is given less importance and is considered customary, obligatory, and taken for granted. Despite this, the survey revealed that 92.5% of female respondents associated economic value with their domestic work, while only 4% attached no economic value to household tasks. However, the size of that valuation was not asked, nor were men asked whether women's work has economic value.

The respondents provided a number of reasons to explain the importance of the work they do; for instance, that it involves labour and brings skills, a dirty home is irritating, they do not feel satisfied until the household work is completed, and it saves money. The most prevalent reason for considering the work valuable seems to be saving money; one fourth of the women surveyed reported that domestic work saves money for various other activities.



The economic value of women's work

Assigning an economic value to the work undertaken by women without pay is no easy task. For much of the work performed by women a market value exists, but the range can be great, depending on the setting in which that task is performed. Perhaps universally, where work is usually done by women, the pay rate is lower than for work typically done by men. The figures given here are not meant to be exact equivalents of the salary that women would earn if they did household-related work for pay, but rather to indicate an approximate range of value that allows us to understand the magnitude of the value of women's work.

When looking at the various activities performed by women in and around the home, the greatest allocation of time, though not necessarily the highest in economic value, is for meal preparation, which takes 210 hours per month. (Other tasks which require less time would be paid at a far higher rate, such as nursing the sick and tutoring children.) Women spend on average a further 60 hours per month cleaning house, 30 hours per month washing dishes, 20 hours per month on clothes maintenance (including washing and ironing), and 8 hours per month sewing. This adds up to 328 hours per month or almost 11 hours per day; the remaining 5 hours would be spent on all other tasks including caring for children and other family members, gardening, chauffeuring children, and so on (see urban-rural comparisons below).

TABLE 1: Estimated value of various household tasks

Task	Hours per month	Urban "wage"	Rural "wage"
Cooking/preparing meals	210	1,200	700
Washing, ironing clothes	60	1,200	500
Dishwashing	30	600	400
Housecleaning	20	600	400
Making and mending clothes	8	400	150
Total per month	328	4,000 Rs. (US\$66.67)	2,150 Rs. (\$35.83)
Total per year	3,936	48,000 Rs. (US\$800)	25,800 Rs. (US\$430)
Adjusted "wage" ⁶		US\$1,185.19	US\$637.04

As shown in Table 1 above, if tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and making clothes were outsourced, then a single household in an urban area could be expected to pay 1,200 Rs. per month for cooking, 1,200 Rs. a month for washing and ironing of clothes, 600 Rs. for dishwashing, 600 Rs. for housecleaning, and 400 Rs. for making and mending clothes. For rural women, the figures are 700 Rs. for cooking, 500 Rs. for washing and ironing of clothes, 400 Rs. for dishwashing, 400 Rs. for housecleaning, and 150 Rs. for making a suit of clothes. For comparison, a maid that is hired for only a few hours earns 600-800 Rs. per month per activity, such as for cleaning the house or washing dishes, with the amount variable by area of living, size of house and number of family members.

Totalling those figures results in a monthly sum for urban

⁶ Since the wage given is only for 10.5 hours of the 16-hour day, the figures have been adjusted accordingly to account for the full workday (e.g. (800*16)/10.5).

households of 4,000 Rs. per month or 48,000 per year, or roughly US\$800. The amount that would be spent by a single rural household is 2,150 Rs. per month, which is Rs. 25,800 per annum, equal to about US\$430. These figures indicate the significant economic value of unpaid work and the important role played by such work in daily life, yet the figures fail to include many other important tasks carried out by women, such as raising and tutoring children, caring for the ill and elderly, maintaining household accounts, planning (as opposed to preparing) meals, and so on. If a nurse was hired to care for sick family members, the family would have to pay 600-800 Rs. per day for the services; similarly, other skilled tasks carried out by women would involve far higher rates of pay than those used in the calculation. The figure is thus likely to be a serious underestimate of the actual value.

Maids only wash dishes once, while the housewife washes them three times a day. Women who have hired maids do not feel contented with their work; that is the reason why housewives are always with the maids while the maids are working. It is then an additional task for women to supervise their servants. And many women do not hire a maid because maids do not work with their heart or it gets tougher for them to keep an eye on them to work effectively. Some women perceive that hiring a maid is a full time activity till they are done with the work. [Female respondent]

Valuing women's unpaid household work in Pakistan

Around the world, and under direct influence of the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), governments underrate the value of women's unpaid work, excluding most of women's labour from GDP and other measures of national wealth. As a result, women come to be viewed as a net drain on, rather than serving as a significant

contributor to, the national economy. Many men are paid far less than would be feasible if men in turn had to pay women for all the domestic work they do. In that sense, women could be seen as subsidizing salaries throughout the labour force, by contributing their domestic work for free rather than demanding a wage.

The female population of Pakistan aged 15-64 is more than 46 million; 32.5% of the population is urban and 67.5% rural.⁷ Applying the wages calculated in Table 1 across the female urban and rural population aged 15-64, as shown in Table 2, the national economic contribution of women through their domestic work generates a figure of \$25.35 billion.

TABLE 2: Nationwide economic contribution of women

	Urban	Rural
Female population aged 15-64 ⁸	14,970,453	31,092,480
Yearly "wage" for household work	US\$1,185.19	US\$637.04
Yearly wage * female population	US\$17,742,759,378 (\$17.74 billion)	US\$19,807,061,190 (\$19.8 billion)
Total wage for female population (urban + rural)	US\$37,549,820,568 (\$37.55 billion)	

The 2008 estimated GDP for Pakistan is \$160.9 billion (using the official exchange rate) or \$452.7 billion (using purchasing power parity).⁹ The estimated figure contributed by women through their household work, using exceedingly low wage

⁷ http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/area_pop/area_pop.html

⁸ Calculated using the national female population aged 15-64 of 46,062,933 and the figures of 32.5% of the population living in urban and 67.5% in rural areas.

⁹ http://www.theodora.com/wfbcurent/pakistan/pakistan_economy.html

rates, of \$37.55 billion is thus 23.3% of the first figure for GDP or 8.3% of the second. Using more reasonable wage rates for women's work would yield a far higher figure.

In comparing the work done by women to GDP, the following points emerge:

- GDP excludes most of women's work, so if women's work overall were valued at the same rate as men's, GDP would likely at least double.
- Women on average work 16 hours per day, which is likely more than the average figure for men, so their production could greatly exceed that generated by men.
- Women are responsible for providing some of the most basic and essential goods and services, which should be valued at a higher rate than unnecessary or harmful activities, which constitute part of work traditionally included in GDP while the work of caring for home and family are excluded.

The findings reveal that women in urban and rural society are engaged in very different kinds of "additional" activities (that is, additional to the work of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the home), and that wage rates for rural women are lower than for urban. Rural women, meanwhile, spend a large amount of time producing (as opposed to buying) food, working on average 120 hours a month in the fields.

In urban areas, women typically pick up and drop off children at school. If someone is paid to do so, or to garden, the household's available budget would decrease. Yet when a housewife carries out these services she is not compensated; rather she renders her free services to reduce her family's costs. Per month, picking up and dropping off children typically takes thirty hours, helping children with their studies sixty

hours, shopping ten hours, and gardening eight hours.

In rural areas the "additional" activities in which women are engaged include collecting firewood and fetching water, growing vegetables, raising and caring for domestic animals, and working in the fields. The largest expenditure of time is for working in the fields, at 120 hours per month, and helping with family income earning activities, at 60 hours per month. Though they work in the fields, assist with family businesses, and take care of chickens, goats, cows, and so on, when women put livestock up for sale they give the money to their husband for the family's use. As a result, the income earned is considered to be a part of the husband's contribution to the family, rather than the wife's.

Tasks that elude economic valuation

There are certain tasks undertaken by women for which monetary value cannot be assigned. But these services provided by women are also important and add a number of hours to the weekly and monthly routine of housewives. Nobody would or could provide, even for pay, the affection that mothers freely give their family members, or the attention they devote to the raising of their children. Someone could be hired to nurse the sick, but it would not be done with the same level of affection and attentiveness. Other tasks that cannot be assigned monetary value include taking care of older family members, serving guests, teaching children, and visiting sick relatives.

Children require the attention of their mothers, which takes about 180 hours per month. Young children require almost constant attention; even when asleep, women are conscious of the upcoming needs and requirements of the baby such as feeding and cleaning, and frequently must get up during the

night to feed, clean and comfort the baby. No paid servants or day care institutions would look after a child with the same love and care as would a mother even if they are paid a handsome amount of money for taking care of that child. The cost of day care centres range from rupees 1,000-2,000 to rupees 10,000 and more per month depending upon the services, environment and place where it is situated.

Discussion

The status of women in Pakistan remains low. While much has been done to diminish the gaps in education between the sexes, such gaps remain. Girls and women have less access to health care and healthy foods than do males. Women in the home have far less decision-making power than men. While about 20% of Pakistani women have formal paid jobs, most women are labelled as “housewives” with the negative connotation of engaging in no productive work despite all the essential tasks they perform in terms of maintaining the home, preparing food, and caring for others.

Across the country and throughout most of their lives, females, including all housewives, in Pakistan contribute to the family budget as well as to the economy of the country. They work about 16 hours per day on household work, half on “major” and half on “minor” tasks, though even the women themselves generally underestimate the time they spend and likely the importance of the work. That contribution is worth at least tens of billions of US dollars per year. It is considered to be their responsibility to run the home and to care for children and often the elderly. Although the housewife does a number of tasks at home, her work is not counted as a part of GDP, and

since it is unpaid and “voluntary,”¹⁰ it is not documented as remunerated work. Yet, when looked at in a different way, women’s unpaid work represents a financial support to the entire economy.

In addition to all the tasks for which an economic value can be assigned, however much an underestimate, are all the tasks for which no value can easily be given. These include the nurturing and caring aspect of much of women’s work that simply cannot be purchased.

While women are undervalued, they are by no means unoccupied. They must carry out many tasks simultaneously. Their long working days continue through most of their lifetime. Many women work from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., and few have help, especially from their husbands. As a result, women have little or no free or leisure time, and are likely to engage in household work even while “relaxing” or watching TV.

The nature of the work varies particularly between rural and urban areas, with rural women around the country engaging in similar tasks, just as women in urban areas around the country do similar work. But the time spent working varies little between urban and rural areas.

While women say that their work has economic value, it is unlikely that they understand the magnitude of it. Women who do not hold a paying job are generally accorded little value. Even when they do earn an income, the opinions of women are seen to be of little importance, with men taking

¹⁰ “Voluntary” is a misleading term when applied to women’s work. Consider the question of why women do not go on strike to demand better working conditions in their homes, or more respect for their contributions. How long would a woman last in a dirty home, faced by hungry children and a wailing baby?

most of the responsibility for major decision-making in the home, though such “minor” decisions as daily household purchases are generally left to women.

It is important to point out that men are able to engage in paid labour because of all the work that women do without pay. Without the work of Pakistani women, businesses and other employers would have to pay a far higher salary to men to allow them to hire someone to do the domestic work without which they could not go to work, and families — and hence society and the nation — would not function. Women thus indirectly and directly provide financial assistance and the basic necessities of life to their family. Through their work in the home, women help to save money for other needs or for future requirements, and much of what they do is too valuable to be assigned a price.

But just a reminder, in case the focus on monetary values implies that women’s most important contribution is an economic one: societies cannot function with only the economic side of life. Equally or more important is the caring that goes into maintaining a household and nurturing its members. While it may remain an open question as to whether money can buy love, it certainly cannot buy the affection with which women tend to their family members. Without the daily tasks of caring, nurturing, and supporting others, society would crumble. The point of assigning an economic value is not to undervalue what really counts but to remind ourselves that, even in the “male” world of economics, women make an enormous and essential, if usually unrecognized, contribution.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The family is the basic unit of society, and women play a critical role by contributing to its welfare and to the

development of the society as a whole. However, the importance of women’s role in the family and society is neither fully recognized nor appreciated. Socially prescribed roles of women become a basis for discrimination and lack of participation of women in the society. Pakistani females lack basic rights to education, health care, essential nutrition, and, as adults, to decision making within the family and community. Much could be done to improve the situation; only a few suggestions are touched on here.

Leadership

At the personal level, perhaps the first thing that needs to be done is to change the way children are raised. Daughters should have the opportunity to develop their decision-making skills and leadership capacities, and sons must be trained to respect their sisters as equals. In particular, daughters must be ensured equal access to the same quantity, quality, and type of food, education and health care as sons.

In order to benefit from the more family-oriented perspective of women in policymaking and other leadership positions, immediate steps must be taken to place more women in decision-making and leadership positions and, at the same time, provide them with the necessary catch-up training and experience in order to be effective. However, as the experience of capable women decision-makers has demonstrated, these measures alone will not be sufficient. The institutional context of decision-making and leadership must be addressed in order to create more women- and family-friendly institutions and organizational cultures. Some industrial countries — mostly in Europe — have already begun, albeit slowly, to move in this direction, reducing working hours, introducing flexi-time and career structures for part-time workers (most of whom are women) and providing government-subsidized or work-based

child care, maternity and parental leave and emergency leave for caregivers (Heymann and Beem 2005).

It is also vital that there be women in senior positions able to act as role models and mentors for young women and women's networks that can support women in the same way that conventional male-dominated networks support the career development and promotions of men. In addition, institutions need to re-examine organizational cultures and work practices.

Valuing household work

Not all women can or wish to work for pay. The work performed in the house by women is vital to people's wellbeing, and attempts to ensure that all women work outside the home or work for pay will have negative effects on those dependent on the tasks traditionally performed by women. While by no means arguing for the virtual enslavement of women in the home, it is important to remember that for many women this *is* their job, and one that would yield much satisfaction if it also entailed similar benefits and respect to paid jobs. Recognizing the importance of household work — including but by no means limited to childcare and care of the elderly — would help in raising the status of women and in addressing the poverty and dependency faced by many full-time housewives. A society that respects and values the work of caring for others would also be far more humane than one that only values paying jobs.

Women and paid work

Regarding paid work, women's capacity to earn can be increased by improving the availability of opportunities for women in remunerated employment. Equal remunerations for men and women for equal or similar work should be ensured. A job outside the home presents an attractive

alternative to dependence on others, giving the woman a sense of purpose and identity separate from her role as wife and mother. Discussions with the women participants suggest that working women have greater psychological health, well-being and self-esteem than housewives who have never worked outside the home and women who have worked in paid jobs for less than one year.

Measures can be taken to make the workplace conducive for the women worker, so that more females can join paid work and enjoy mental and psychological wellbeing, while still valuing women who do not work outside the home. Significantly, this should be a choice for those with the luxury to decide, rather than a decision forced on women by the disapproval of family or society.

Special courses can be conducted for women in entrepreneurial skills to assist them to establish their own small-scale enterprise at home or outside the home. An important caveat here is about the danger of burdening women — a burden they might happily accept in return for greater job opportunities, but one which takes its toll on women and families.

As women enter the formal workforce in larger numbers, a more equal sharing of household responsibilities will become even more important. The system in some European countries of a maximum 36-hour workweek for *everyone* could be a model, encouraging both women and men to spend sufficient time with their families as well as to enjoy the benefits of the formal working world.

Men and household work

The extremely low figure for men helping their wives with household work demonstrated in this research is another matter which should be addressed, through positive

campaigns seeking to encourage men to take a more significant role in the family — and highlighting the advantages that would accrue to men if they did so. Greater involvement of men in domestic tasks would decrease women's heavy load, raise men's understanding and compassion for domestic matters, and increase their involvement with their children.

Valuing women

Many men believe that women have little value and are just a burden for which they have to provide food, clothing, shelter and security. Similar views may be held by government officials in determining budgets for women's issues. It is vital that officials and others recognize that expenditures on women — whether in the home or at the national level — are not a drain or expense, but rather an investment in the economic and social welfare of the country. Additional research should be conducted in this regard to raise the awareness of people that women contribute to national wealth by taking care of their homes, saving their family money, giving free care service and supporting their husbands and others in a multitude of ways.

Media and education

The role of media can be enhanced as a vehicle for information and education on women's issues and for a positive portrayal of women. Awareness campaigns can be initiated in the media and in schools to promote the positive benefits of a more equal sharing of responsibilities, decision-making, and power between women and men, thereby beginning a transformation to more gender-sensitive men and caring fathers and husbands, and women more capable and confident in assuming new responsibilities.

In seeking to improve the condition of Pakistani women, the

importance of education cannot be ignored. Women have a basic, often unrecognized, but significant role in the education of their children. The family is the first tier in the process of social upbringing, and the mother plays a vital role in the moral and civic upbringing of her children, as well as often helping children with the more mundane task of homework.

Education is thus vital for women so that they can teach their children the difference between right and wrong and mould their children into good citizens. All these responsibilities fall on the shoulders of women, and women who devote themselves to doing the best by their children may be considered to be inactive — not working — if they do not in addition have a paying job outside the home.

According to the latest census conducted in 1998, the female literacy rate in Pakistan is 32.6%. The participation rate of females has increased at the primary level, but high drop-out rates beyond primary school persist as a result of lack of opportunities, mobility issues, and traditions and cultural norms constraining the access of females to higher education. Through education, women would be in a better position to gain awareness concerning their rights, could become more assertive, know the importance of decision-making, understand the issues of family and society and address them effectively, support their children in their school activities and teach them about rights and ethics. The education system therefore needs to be improved for the females of Pakistan.

The role of government

Government should recognize, count and make visible women's real economic contributions in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. For the development and empowerment of women, government should:

- Ensure effective implementation and enforcement of existing rights;
- Remove inequities and imbalances in all sectors of socio-economic development and focus on women's equal access to all development, benefits and social services;
- Safeguard and ensure the protection of women's human rights including economic, political and social rights of women in rural and urban areas, among those with and without formal employment, for young and elderly women of all abilities and income groups; and
- Provide women and girls access to quality health care services, to enjoy full health, including reproductive and mental health.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to estimate the scale of women's contribution to families, society, and the nation's economy through their inexorable hard work and precious contributions. If the household work were out-sourced it would be very expensive. Calculating its value helps provide a clue as to what is saved by the women of Pakistan and contributed to their families. The results indicate that women across the country are contributing approximately US\$37.55 billion to the national economy.

Calculating the economic value of women's unpaid work and adding that value to measures of national wealth such as GDP would not only significantly increase the sum represented by GDP but would increase the value or meaning of the figure. It would also boost the significance of GDP by including a long-neglected element, the unpaid work of women.

Whether Pakistani women work exclusively in the home or elsewhere as well, they labour hard from dawn to dark. As a basic human rights issue, their prevailing conditions should be improved and measures taken to make apparent their "invisible" work and the contribution they render for the betterment of family and country. Their rights should be protected regarding access to justice, education, and decision-making in the family and community. Opportunities should be made available to them for development of their skills and potential in all spheres of life, especially social, economic and personal. Like all human beings, women require rest, vacation, and free time to partake in leisure activities and thus enjoy physical and mental health. Women also deserve respect as fully contributing, valuable citizens without whom no nation could survive.

Finally, this research is not "just" about the economic value of women's work, but also about the role of women in society. Women are too often viewed as mere help-mates, beings of low education and few skills incapable of making significant contributions. Yet evidence abounds that the contrary is true.

For instance, consider that a pragmatic, efficiency-based argument for women's participation in decision-making and leadership starts from recognition that women and men have different needs, interests, and priorities arising from their specific roles and situations. Even when men are aware of and seek to acknowledge this difference, they lack information in the same way that decision-makers are unable to capture the perspectives and needs of minority cultures or the poor.

This failure to incorporate women's concerns into decision-making represents a major loss for society as a whole. Women's needs, interests, and concerns are not just those of women themselves, but reflect their primary roles as mothers, wives,

and caregivers. Therefore, incorporating a woman's perspective into decision-making should result in better decisions that more adequately reflect the needs and interests of children and families (including the males).

If women were more involved in household decision-making and had more control over financial resources, they would be more likely to use health services and, hence, to have better health outcomes. Women understand the home and family members in a different way than men, and make contributions that are qualitatively different from those of men. Simply put, a society cannot thrive while ignoring the value and contributions of half of its members.

It is hoped that this research will raise attention to the vital role played by women through their household work and to the continuing need to work towards higher status of women. Learning to value women is one of the vital steps that must be taken to create more humane, healthy, balanced and caring societies. Acknowledging the value of the work carried out by women for their families could be an important start.



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