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Unpaid Labour: The Labour Uncounted

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Abstract

Culture matters in determining housework involvement for men and women. Due to cultural conditioning and gender-based role assignments the household tasks in society become the responsibility of women, the labor which is called as unpaid. With the increase in employability among women in recent times, women still do not want to fully share housework because they believe it is central to their gender identity and a source of power in the family. The article reveals various themes and perspectives on the unpaid labor performed by women.

Keywords

Unaid Labour, Paid Labour, Housework, Gender Role.

Introduction

There is a significance of only paid labor in the Family studies perspective with regard to work and family, and this perspective ignores the very real needs of family members for the performance of unpaid labor. The trend in the household labor, unlike the increase in material employment, exhibits very little change over time. Unpaid work is the intersection of three kinds of family work i.e. housework, parenting and kids work.

Unpaid labor is the kind of labor that does not entail receiving any direct remuneration. Domestic and household work is one of the

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common forms of unpaid work, the burden of which is borne by women in the premises of their household. Though women devote long working hours and provide services in the form of domestic labour but this labor has no economic value in the labour market. 'Because homemakers are unpaid, their contributions to the household are unrecognized (*Bergmann, 1986*)'. To feminists, unpaid work and reproductive work are two kinds of underreported employment (*Riche, 2006*). Work of raising children, cooking, etc. is done by someone outside the family, and then the work is 'paid'.

Women, whether employed are accountable for the majority of domestic chores and child-care activities or unpaid labor. Housework, across race and class, remains women's work: Wives still cook, clean, shop and manage domestic routines more than their husbands. 'Although even single women do more housework than single men, the gap grows when they marry-men start doing even less, and women begin to do even more (*Gupta, 1999*)'.

The tradition of *Talcott Parsons* doesn't treat households as places of work instead views them as realms of 'expressive activity'. The concept of unpaid labor encompasses issues of gender, race, devaluation or invisibilization of women's work, parenting, leisure and its related consequences in the form of stress, abuse, etc. There is a huge gap between the household work performed by women and men. Though men's participation or involvement in household chores has increased but women still perform three times more routine household tasks than men (*Coltrane, 2000; Thompson & Walker, 1989*). *Bianchi and others* found that the father's hours of housework had doubled from 1965 to 1985, but husbands still only 'help'. They do far less housework than their wives and rarely initiate or manage housework.

Coltrane (2000) says that men who do fewer hours of paid work and earn less do more housework. Thus, the employment nature of men affects their role in housework. There are also studies saying that husbands whose wives earn more and husbands without jobs do less domestic work. (*Brines, 1994; Geneenstein 2000*)

Culture matters in determining housework involvement. According to *Coltrane (2000)*, "Women still do not want to fully share housework

because they believe it central to their gender identity and a source of power in the family. But the more an egalitarian family or egalitarian a husband's gender ideology, the more time he spends doing housework. The more egalitarian a wife's gender ideology, the less time she spends doing housework and the more time her husband spends doing housework." (Brayfield, 1992; Presser, 1995; Harpster & Monk-Turner, 1998)

Unequal distribution by gender housework often further limits women's ability to achieve financial independence. Noonan (2001) found that doing housework, especially 'feminine' chores, has a negative effect on women's wages. Studies found that the division of housework on a gender basis is not similar in all the racial groups. Like Black husbands perform a somewhat larger share of housework and spend somewhat more time on it than white husbands. (Kamo and Cohen, 1998)

Some studies found a relationship between the unpaid labor and leisure activity. People working long hours, especially those who work more than one job and those who have caregiving responsibilities as well are found less free time. 'When work hours are long, women spend less time in sleep, leisure, and personal care (Wilson, 1929)'. There is also a study by Moen and others (2003) which reveals that when women worked long hours, they also engaged in more leisure, and their husbands did more housework and child care.

There is also a link between parenting and child caring and stress among women. Gray et al.(1990) found in a study that stresses are related to caring for a newborn child and working mothers. Goggins and Burder (1987) reveal that employed mothers spent more hours on home chores and child-care activities than fathers. Mothers also had low levels of health and energy and were absent more from work compared to fathers.

There is an exclusion of unpaid labor from working time causing its devaluation and also invisibilisation of this labor done by women. UN Report on the World Social Situation, 2016, says, 'over 51% of the labor done by women is unpaid, and is not calculated in the nation's GDP and other statistics'. The devaluing of unpaid work has stirred debates concerning overwork. Juliet Schor in 'The Overworked American'

(1991), actually included housework and childcare in calculations related to overwork but the idea could not gain momentum as a possible source of overwork is paid employment.

In 'Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint', *Silvia Federici* asserts that reproductive labor is a hidden continent of work'. Women's work within the house is viewed to be unproductive and not the part of the economy. With this women also possess a secondary status within the workforce. 'Nature and women working to produce and reproduce life are declared 'unproductive' (*Felice, 2003*).' According to *Vandana Shiva*, an Indian eco-feminist, "Productive man producing commodities, using some of nature's wealth and women's work as raw material and dispensing with the rest as waste, becomes the only legitimate category of work, wealth and production."

Therefore, the connection between work and wages coupled with the glorification of the home as the site of men's restoration and leisure had a dramatic impact on the status of women's household laborers. As women's work within the premise of home doesn't yield a wage, it came to be viewed as nonproduction. Though women produce a great many things within the home, the items they make and services they render are redefined as 'caring for their families' rather than providing for them (*Bodystone, 1990*).

Theoretical Perspectives on Unpaid Labour

Sociologically, the views on gender roles and unpaid labor by women can broadly be divided into three categories – Biological, Cultural and Marxian

Biological Perspective

The perspective delineates that the sexual division of labor and gender inequality is determined by biological or genetic differences between men and women. *George Peter Murdock*, an anthropologist argued that biological distinction between both sexes is the basis for the sexual division of labour in society. Biological differences in men like physical strength while in women like the bearing of a child, decide their gender roles through practicality. This sexual of division is indispensable for the organization of a society. In the survey of 224 societies by him, he concluded this fact that due to physical strength men take more strenuous

tasks like lumbering, hunting, mining, etc. than women whose largely female roles are cooking, gathering food, carrying water, etc. Biological functions regarding childbearing and nursing tie women to the home domain.

Talcott Parsons and the tradition of structural-functionalism, for which he became known, is among the most influential American social theorists of the World War II era. Parsons and his colleagues (*Parsons, 1964; Parsons and Bales, 1955*) viewed domesticity as especially well-suited to an industrial economy and derived what they saw as general principles of social organization from this observation.

In particular, Parsons says that social norms expect men to do paid labor, as the family breadwinner and women to care for children and maintain the home and this becomes the foundation for his conceptions of role differentiation and 'sex roles'. The male sex role, according to him, was oriented toward instrumental action, while the female sex role was expressively oriented. Parsons associated this distinction with occupational roles and family roles, respectively.

Moreover, he argued that the division of labor whereby men have responsibility to fulfill the instrumental tasks is related to being a wage-earner and women as responsible for the expressive tasks i.e. caring for children and providing emotional support to the family, strengthened both family solidarity and industrial society as a whole.

John Bowlby (1946) explains the woman's role from a psychological perspective. Like Parsons, he argues that a mother's place is in the home as child caring during his formative is very indispensable. He conducted a number of studies on juvenile delinquents and concluded that delinquents were psychologically disturbed due to their separation from their mothers at an early age. Due to deprivation from maternal love, they appeared unable to receive or give love and adopted deviant paths and anti-social relationships. So, a mother's warmth, and intimate and continuous relationships are very essential for a child's mental health and life. He argues that it is a genetic psychological need for an intimate and close mother-child relationship.

Cultural Perspective

Sociologists holding this perspective assume that human behavior is strongly determined and directed by culture and gender roles are the byproducts of it rather than biology.

Ann Oakley, the British sociologist explicitly rejects Murdock and Parsons and argues that the allocation of gender roles or sexual division of labor is culturally determined rather than biologically. Criticizing Murdock's Western and male eye viewpoint on gender roles, she says that the sex-based division of labor is not a ubiquitous phenomenon, as not always men perform certain tasks and women do others. She finds that in 14 out of 224 societies studied by Murdock where either females or both the sexes were engaged in lumbering activities, in 36 societies clearing of land is done by women, and in 38 societies cooking is a shared activity. Criticizing Parsons, she said that the 'expressive role of women' is not biological rather it exists due to men's convenience. She further says that evidences show that it is in no way dysfunctional or detrimental to the well-being of children if mothers work outside homes. Thus, it is culture that decides the gender roles which varies from society to society.

Similarly, *Bruno Bettelheim (1969)*, a child psychiatrist did a study of collective childrearing in a Kibbutz and found that children who are raised by educators in group homes can do far better than children brought up by their mothers in poverty-stricken homes. The children in Kibbutz (Kibbutzim settlements in Israel) were found hardworking, had deep, loving and intimate relationships among themselves, were not delinquent and their dropout rate was low. As comparing them to Western society's children they are not individualistic and emotionally flat. Therefore, Bettelheim argues that the mother-child relationship is not much needed for effective socialization.

Ernestine Friedl (1984) gives a cultural explanation of gender roles and notes that they vary from society to society. But the underlying fact is this that if a work which is done by women in one society and in another by men, the task done by men in another society carries higher weight age and prestige. In every society, the roles and tasks allocated to men carry higher prestige and power because those works involve exchange of valued goods, control of scarce resources and involves risks.

Childbearing and nursing by women are not compatible with the demand of hunting by men, as meat hunted by them is scarce, involves risks and has higher exchange value.

Similarly, in horticulture societies, the land allocation is controlled by men and its defense involves them in political and economic alliances with other groups. They control the distribution of goods beyond the domestic group. Therefore, it is a male-dominated culture that decides the allocation of gender roles and men carry those roles which have higher power and prestige. *Sherry B. Ortner (1974)* gives a cultural explanation of gender roles and the universal devaluation of women. She points out that every culture places a lower value on women than on men.

Marxian Perspective

Marxian feminists acknowledge the association between capitalism and family, and also family life as a key feature behind women's exploitation. There are economic contributions to society made by domestic labour of women but family life disadvantages women in many ways. They are the victims of capitalistic and patriarchal exploitation.

Fran Ansley (1972) argues that 'in capitalist system, the wife's emotional aid acts as a safety valve for the frustration produced in the husband by working in this system'. Hence, they are unable to revolt against the system, as their frustrations are observed by comforting wives. Ansley's words "When wives play their traditional role as takers of shit, they often absorb their husband's legitimate anger and frustration at their own powerlessness and oppression." (*Bernard, 1976*).

Similarly *Feedey (1972)* sees 'family is a kind of an authoritarian unit dominated by husband and other adults and children are socialized to accept paternal authority in the capitalist society'. She claims that in family authoritarian ideology is devised to inculcate passivity, not rebellion, where everyone acquires their place in the hierarchy of power and control.

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