



Study on Women, Housework, and the Cost of Invisible Labour

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Abstract:

This paper explores the invisible labor of housework, primarily performed by women, and its profound impact on gender inequality and economic development, particularly in India. The research investigates the socio-cultural dynamics of unpaid household work, highlighting its physical, mental, and emotional effects on women. Despite its significant contribution to society, housework is not recognized as remunerative labor, a notion rooted in patriarchal gender roles. In India, women spend significantly more time on household chores than men, yet this labor remains unaccounted for in the nation's economic statistics. Through a survey conducted across India, the study gauges public perception of household work, its long-term effects, and the potential for recognizing it as full-time employment. The findings reveal a stark gender disparity, with the majority of respondents acknowledging that women spend more time on housework than men. Many people support the idea of paying for housework in order to elevate the status of homemakers. The study concludes with recommendations to formalize compensation for housework, suggesting a modest salary to recognize its economic value and promote gender equality.

Keywords: household work, homemakers, economic statistics, Invisible Labour

1. Introduction

Housework is a well-known concept, typically understood as a combination of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual activities performed for one's own household or someone else's as part of one's responsibilities ^[1]. It includes the physical tasks of cooking and cleaning, as well as the emotional and mental effects of this work, along with the negative spiritual consequences that can arise from years of labor. Traditionally, housework has been viewed as a domain primarily associated with women, rooted in the division of labor based on gender roles. While men can participate in household duties, there still exists a significant division of work influenced by these traditional roles ^[2]. This disparity in involvement is also evident across different countries. For instance, in developing countries like Mexico, women aged 15 to 64 spend an average of six hours each day on unpaid household activities.

Among different regions, South Asian women (such as Indian and Bangladeshi women) spend the most time on unpaid household work. They dedicate about 6.7 times more time to these tasks than their male counterparts. This disparity in unpaid household work reflects the negligible and uneven progress towards gender equality and women's economic development [3] Despite living in an era of greater awareness regarding gender inequality and patriarchy, women's contributions to economic stability remain minimal. In India, for example, women spend approximately 352 minutes per day on household work, while men spend only 52 minutes per day.

This disparity in the labor force represents an even bigger problem of gender inequality and the social status of women. According to the Gender Gap Report 2020 released by the World Economic Forum, gender parity will not be achieved for another 99.5 years. These concerning statistics indicate that in the near future, equality between the sexes is unlikely to be realized.

2. Literature Review

This study looks into the concept of housework in India and women's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product. The author has also focused on the underlying hold of patriarchy and women's contribution to society. To ensure the authenticity and originality in the paper, the researcher has reviewed the works of other authors as well.

Unpaid House work and Lifelong Earning [4] The work of the author consists of data collection and conclusions that arise from it. This is fundamentally distinct from the author's work, as the author seeks to evaluate the underlying reasons, especially in the Indian context.

Psicothema [5] In the works of authors Juan Fernández, M. Ángeles Quiroga, Sergio Escorial and Jesús Privado focuses on the gender division of labour. In this study, the author is focusing on the aspect of housework and its economic contribution to society

The Culture of Women's House work: A Case Study of Bihar, India [6] Naresh Chandra Sourabh, another author, has conducted a case study on the culture of women's housework with reference to Bihar, India. The author has carried out a detailed analysis of the social, cultural, and educational aspects but has not evaluated women's contribution of unpaid labor to the GDP. This lack of evaluation is the main focus of this study.

3. Hypothesis:

The value of a work lies in its remuneration or income earned. This is the reality of women's work today. It is not valued as there is no salary attached to it. It is understood as a duty or responsibility associated with women. Moreover, the patriarchal nature of society has fixed roles that makes housework a stringent role of women. The author has assumed that patriarchal notions in society are pre-existing and has limited the roles of women. The contribution of women to the economy is unaccounted for and the author believes that a

fixed remuneration could uplift the status of women in society.

Objectives:

- To understand the underlying causes of gender inequality in the household.
- To evaluate if modern feminist movements can ensure equality.
- To analyse the contribution of women from the unorganized sector in society.
- To combat the roles pre-existing in the society

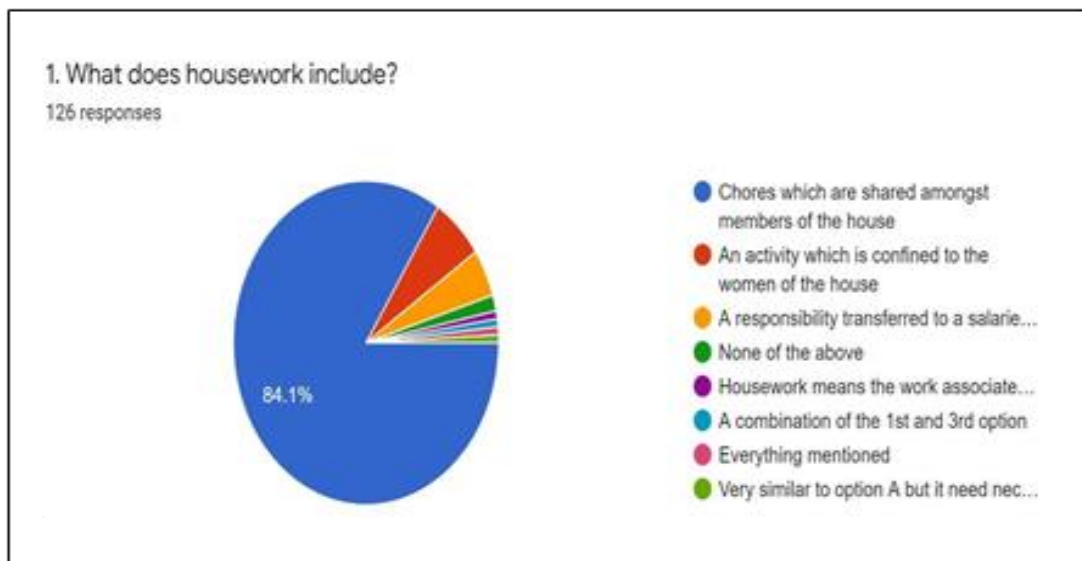
The given data online has been interpreted using graphs and statistics. It has been represented in a comparative manner of bar graphs to clearly indicate the disparities among genders.

In the primary data collected by the researcher, the researcher had asked 5 questions and received huge responses. These questions are:

1. What does Housework include?
2. What are the long-term effects of Household work?
3. Do you believe that women spend more time doing house hold work than men?
4. According to Oxfam India report 2020, Indian men spend approximately 52 minutes per day on household work whereas Indian women spend 352 minutes per day. Do you think that this disparity is justifiable?
5. Do you agree that house hold work should be considered as a full-time employment?

This survey was circulated through the online mode and the responses received were from all over India. This indicates the variety of opinions accounting to the regional geography of the person. The survey conducted was not limited to any particular age group and included students, working professionals and even housewives. Thus, a broad variety in the attitudes and ideas are inclusive in this survey.

1.What does Housework Include?

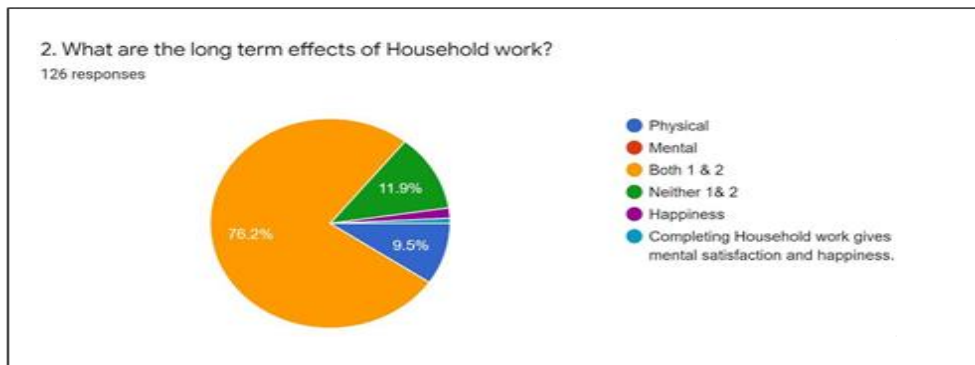


The researcher raised the question in the survey to understand the different notions and ideas about housework. The results showed a clear majority, with 84.1% of the target

population agreeing that housework activities should be shared among family members. Some responses indicated that housework is a combination of all the options mentioned or specifically a mix of the first and second options.

S. No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Chores which are shared amongst the members of the house.	106	84.1%
2.	An activity which is confined to the women of the house.	8	6.3%
3.	A responsibility transferred to a salaried employee (Maid).	6	4.8%
4.	None of the above	2	1.6%

2. What are the long-term effects of Household work?

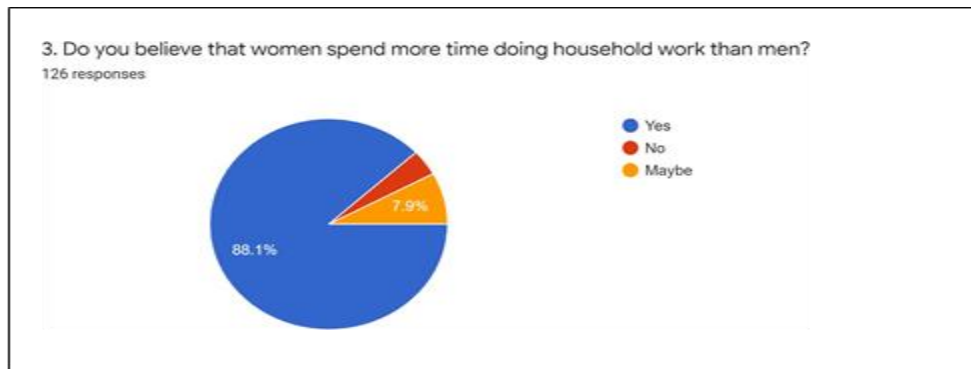


In the 2nd question, the questionnaire sought to find if the population agrees about the long-term effects of housework. Long term effects can either be negative or positive. Negative physical effects include back pain, hand pain etc. Positive physical effects include the same results as going to the gym. Increased cardio while doing household chores can extend the stamina and strength of the person. On the other hand, long term mental effects of household work ranges from depression and frustration to mental satisfaction and happiness. This question was raised to understand if the population agrees that there are indeed long-term effects

S No.	Responses	No. of Responses	Percentage
1.	Physical	12	9.5%
2.	Mental	0	0
3.	Both 1 &2	96	76.2%

4.	Neither 1 &2	15	11.9%
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3. Do you believe that women spend more time doing house hold work than men?



The third question aimed to determine if the target population agreed that women spent more time than men on household work in India. Patriarchy, as a concept, has a historical context among social scientists such as Max Weber [7]. He defined it as a system of governance where men ruled societies as heads of households [8].

Due to such Patriarchal notions existing even in a modern society like India, there exists a gendered division of roles in the family. As a result, the role of the female is to look after the house and take care of the family while men are expected to go out, work and earn a steady income for the family.

S No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes	111	88.1%
2.	No	5	4%
3.	Maybe	10	7.9%

The study indicates that a majority of people agree that women spend more time doing household chores than men. 'Maybe' was included as an option because it is subject to different kinds of households and conditions.

4. According to Oxfam India report 2020, Indian men spend approximately 52 minutes per day on household work whereas Indian women spend 352 minutes per day. Do you think that this disparity is justifiable?

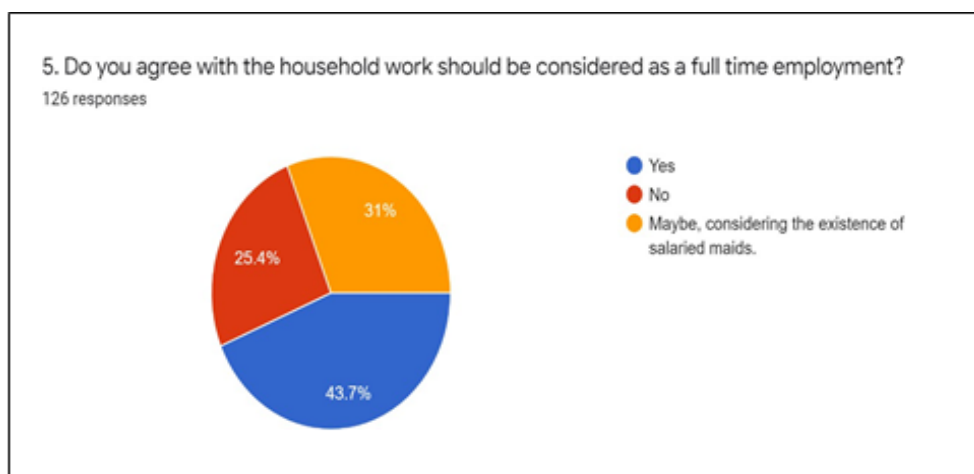


The fourth question is statistical and requires the respondent to justify the disparity in the statistics collected. This contrast becomes more prominent in rural areas according to the Oxfam India Report 2020 [9].

S No.	Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes, as more men go out and work in India.	23	18.3%
2.	No, as women juggle a variety of chores including outside work and hence household work ought to be shared.	98	77.8%

Presently, in a modern society where women are so actively involved in the work force like men such a wide disparity is disappointing

5. Do you agree that household work should be considered as a full-time employment?



The final question was raised to find solutions to the invisible labor existing in society.

Full-time employment can elevate the status of homemakers and garner respect in society. The concept of full-time employment is favored and even essential, but the researcher has also taken into account the problems that can be faced in its practical application.

S No.	Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes	55	43.7%
2.	No	32	25.4%
3.	May be, considering the existence of salaried maids.	39	31%

Conclusion:

The study of housework as invisible labor underscores the deep-rooted gender inequality present in Indian society. Women continue to bear the brunt of unpaid household chores, spending significantly more time than men on tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving. This disparity is not merely a result of individual choices but is driven by long-standing patriarchal norms that assign domestic duties exclusively to women. The overwhelming majority of respondents in the survey confirmed the gendered nature of housework, emphasizing that the unequal distribution of labor persists, even in modern, urban settings. Despite growing awareness of gender inequality, housework remains undervalued and is often seen as a mere “responsibility” rather than recognized as essential work contributing to societal well-being. Furthermore, the long-term effects of household work, both physical and mental, highlight the significant toll that this labor takes on women’s health and well-being. While some positive physical outcomes, such as increased stamina, were acknowledged, the majority of respondents recognized the mental strain and frustration that result from constant domestic labor. This reinforces the need to reconsider the nature of housework and its impact on women’s lives, especially in the context of economic growth. The invisible contribution of women to the economy, although substantial, remains unaccounted for, preventing any meaningful economic recognition or compensation. The lack of remuneration for such labor perpetuates the undervaluation of women’s roles in society and reinforces gender inequality.

In conclusion, the paper advocates for a paradigm shift in how society perceives housework and suggests practical solutions for addressing this inequality. One such solution is to introduce fixed compensation for housework, recognizing its economic and social value. By doing so, women’s labor would be appropriately acknowledged, helping to elevate their social and economic status. Additionally, fostering greater gender equality requires challenging traditional gender roles and encouraging a more equitable distribution of household duties. Implementing a structured and fair compensation system for housework, particularly in rural areas where patriarchal norms are more rigid, could pave the way for greater gender parity in the long term.

Based on the conclusions found, the researcher has the following suggestions.

- The troubling statistics presented indicate a significant disparity in the workforce, necessitating urgent improvement. The author suggests fixed employment for housewives in the form of a monthly payment.
- This amount can be nominal and should be paid, taking into consideration the salary of the domestic help (maids).
- In rural areas where strict patriarchy is prevalent, a committee to determine a fixed salary based on the work completed by women is beneficial.

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