

# IT'S ABOUT TIME

The case for valuing women and girls' unpaid care work

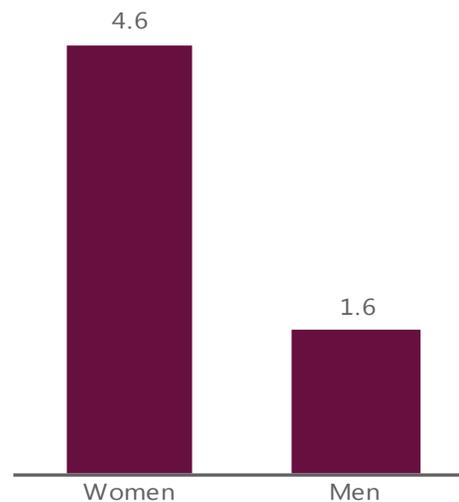
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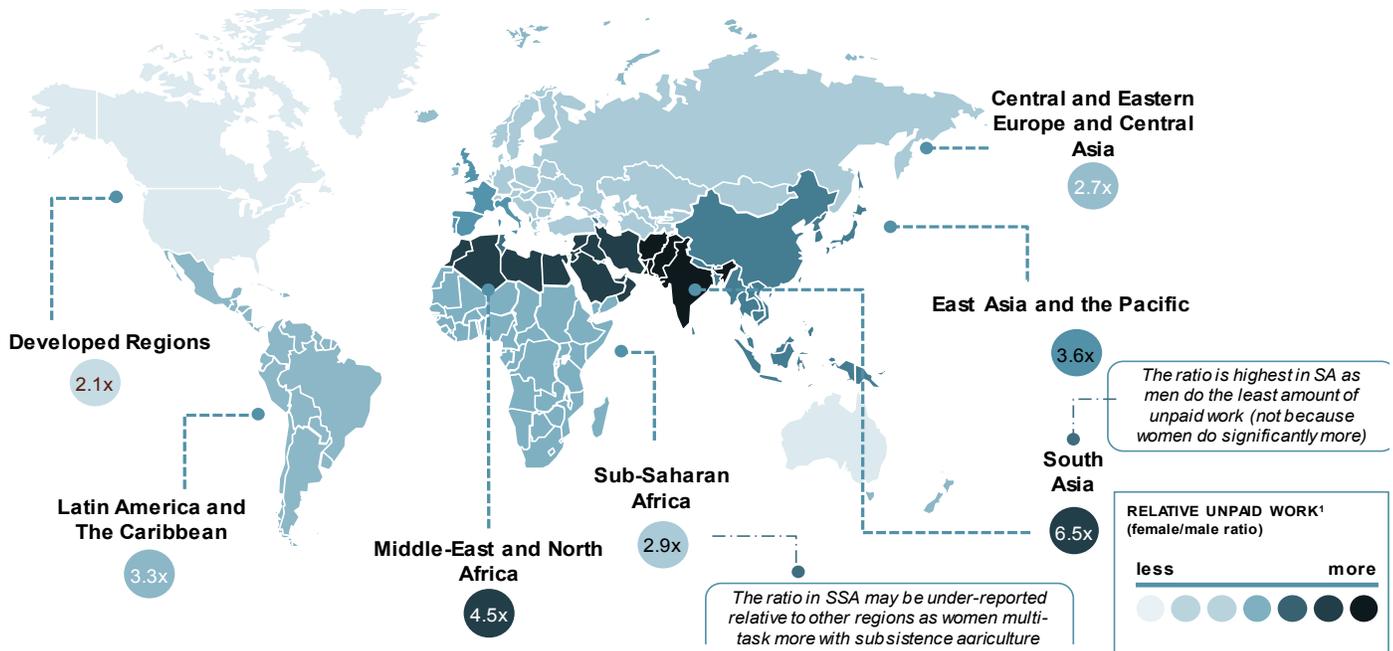
Women spend several hours every day - an estimated 7 years more than men over a lifetime - caring for children, caring for the elderly, cooking, and cleaning their homes.<sup>1</sup> This “unpaid care work” is critical to everyday life. Yet, it is unequally distributed in nearly every household in the world. The ratio of how much of this work is done by women vs. men ranges widely - from 1.5x in Norway and Canada to over 10x in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> However, in no country is this work distributed equally between men and women.

This article makes the case for valuing women and girls' unpaid care work in the home, by recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work. The findings are derived from Dalberg's on-going work on this topic, which began in 2016. Since 2016, we have built a database of global time use across 75+ countries, conducted a literature review of over 100 articles and reports, and interviewed over 60 experts.<sup>4</sup>

Hours spent on unpaid care work each day, average across 29 countries, latest year available<sup>2</sup>



Average ratio of unpaid care work done by women to men, latest year available<sup>3</sup>



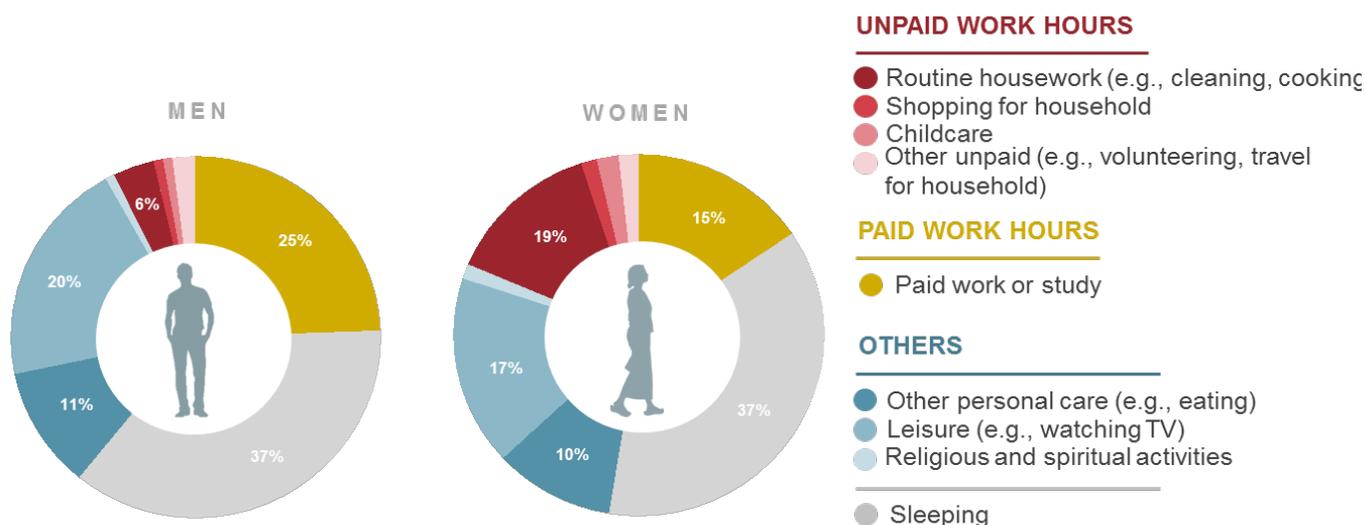
<sup>1</sup> Dalberg analysis, based on data from UN Women.

<sup>2</sup> Dalberg analysis, based on national time use surveys.

<sup>3</sup> Dalberg analysis, based on data from UN Women for latest year available.

<sup>4</sup> This work was done (in part) in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Gender Equality Team, for their women's economic empowerment strategy.

Time spent on various activities, percentage of hours per day, across 29 countries for latest year available<sup>6</sup>



Our research finds that the unequal split of unpaid care tasks limits women and girls' potential. In particular, it affects their economic empowerment. The heavy and unequal split of unpaid care responsibilities reinforces gendered norms (for example, norms around a “woman’s job” versus a “man’s job”) and creates foregone opportunities for quality paid work. For example, women are 10-20% more likely to drop out of the workforce after having a child, often citing the lack of quality affordable childcare as a reason.<sup>5</sup> One in five economically inactive young women across 31 developing countries cite family responsibilities as the main reason for their lack of income-generating work.<sup>7</sup> In addition, unpaid care work responsibilities affect women’s quality of participation, pay, and progression in the workforce. For example, women with higher housework responsibilities are more likely to enter flexible, part-time, or informal jobs. Ultimately, the unequal distribution of this work limits women in all walks of leadership. This further reinforces gender gaps as women are not equally represented in decision-making.

Mothers of young children (under six) and adolescent girls are the two groups most affected by unpaid care work responsibilities. Women see up to a 50% increase in unpaid care work when they have children, much higher than men.<sup>8</sup> In fact, married women with children spend 2.3x more time on unpaid care work than married men with children in developed countries, an estimated 5.8 hours per day compared to 2.5 for men.<sup>9</sup> Globally, mothers earn 20-40% less on average than non-mothers, a phenomenon often referred to as the “motherhood penalty”.<sup>10</sup> Girls also take on these responsibilities at a critical time in their lives – early adolescence. For example, on average, girls aged 10-14 do 1.3 hours of unpaid care work per day, nearly 50% higher than boys.<sup>11</sup>

Mothers of young children (<6) and adolescent girls are most affected by their unpaid care work responsibilities

<sup>5</sup> ODI, 2016, citing a range of studies that estimate the relationship between having a child and maternal employment (controlling for other factors) in developed and developing countries.

<sup>6</sup> Dalberg analysis, based on individual national time use surveys. Average of time use data for all men and women aged 15-64.

<sup>7</sup> ILO, 2016.

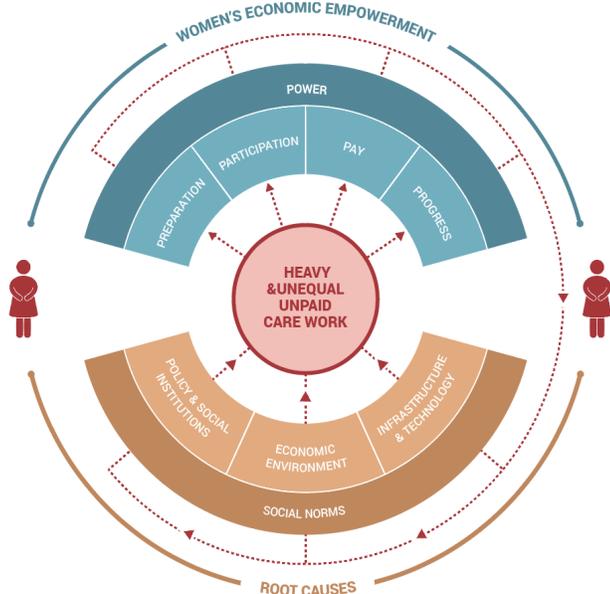
<sup>8</sup> Dalberg analysis, based on Oxford’s Multinational Time Use Dataset.

<sup>9</sup> Dalberg analysis, based on Oxford’s Multinational Time Use Dataset.

<sup>10</sup> Estimated based on a collection of studies cited in ODI, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, 2016.

Impacts & root causes of heavy, unequal unpaid care work



**Tackling the heavy and unequal split of unpaid care work responsibilities requires addressing four inter-related root causes.** Most women live in a world characterized by weak policies and social institutions, which in many cases result in insufficient access to affordable, quality childcare or other care services. The **economic environment**—including lack of access to jobs, gender discriminatory hiring policies, inadequate social protection and unequal wages—often subjects women to poor work conditions or discourages them from undertaking paid work altogether. Inadequate **technology and infrastructure** lead to more physically taxing, time consuming unpaid work. And most fundamentally, **sociocultural norms** label domestic work and care work as “women’s work” and assign it relatively little value. However, estimates of the value of this work place it as high as \$10 trillion, more than 10% of estimated global GDP in 2018.<sup>14</sup>

**This heavy and unequal distribution of unpaid care work does not just hold women back, it handicaps our households, communities and economy** by limiting our children’s health and well-being, reinforcing gendered norms, affecting economic productivity and lowering the size and diversity of the labor force. Recall how current patterns of time use limit women’s economic empowerment. These limitations affect children – research shows that daughters of working mothers are more likely to be educated, employed, and in supervisory roles.<sup>12</sup> These decisions also ripple through the community and the economy. For example, US businesses lose ~\$25bn annually due to absenteeism among full-time working caregivers (men and women<sup>13</sup>). Several estimates show that GDP would be significantly higher if women participated more in the labor force.

<sup>12</sup> Harvard Business School, 2015.  
<sup>13</sup> AARP, 2011.  
<sup>14</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, 2015.

# TAKING ACTION: WHERE TO START

**There is no silver bullet to reducing or redistributing unpaid care work responsibilities.** This is for two reasons. First, the four root causes are inherently intertwined, with sociocultural norms underpinning all other root causes. Second, tackling unpaid care work requires concerted efforts by all actors that influence these root causes, which include those in the household, community, economy, and broader society.

**However, there are three high-potential levers for change.** Dalberg's analysis of over 30 potential approaches to change revealed three levers that hold the most promise to drive impact. These levers were surfaced by balancing three criteria: relevance to the nature of the problem (e.g., addressing root causes, involving multiple actors), existence of promising or proven programs, and the potential for scale.

## Three high-potential levers for change



### 1 Available, affordable, quality care services:

The care economy is critical to unpaid care work, yet models of care provision have barely evolved in the last several decades. We need to test and scale promising public sector childcare programs (e.g., the Mexican government's public daycare initiative that raised women's employment rates by 2-18% across multiple rigorous evaluations). At the same time, we need to explore innovative private and community-level models for care service provision, in the form of employer-provided care, collective care models, or other approaches. Overall, we need to identify new viable models for child and elder care that are high quality, affordable to underserved segments, and fairly compensate care workers.



**Social norms change at scale:** While norms underpin all other root causes and are often deeply entrenched in societies and communities, they can be influenced and even shifted over time. Stark examples of rapid norms change have surfaced in recent years,

including the #MeToo movement's impact on norms around workplace harassment globally and the LGBTQ rights movement's influence on marriage equality in the U.S. We believe norms change at scale requires a combination of best practices from prior projects in international development (e.g., peer effects, working with influencers and gatekeepers) and the usage of new, innovative tools e.g., online platforms, marketing techniques, and data analytic software.



### 3 Technological and design innovations

**to reduce drudgery:** There is a strong business case for innovations that reduce time spent on domestic work. This is evidenced by the multitude of online businesses, mobile apps, and household innovations aimed at saving people time. However, access to these innovations is often limited by affordability constraints. The third lever for change lies at the frontier of digital innovation and infrastructure solutions and leverages macro-trends such as online and mobile access, the emergence of machine learning and artificial intelligence, and off-grid electricity to reduce the burden of household tasks.

## JOIN US

Dalberg is actively looking to partner with private, public, and philanthropic actors to advance action on decreasing the gendered allocation of time in women's lives, via these three levers and more. For further details and to discuss collaborations, please contact **Rachna Saxena** (rachna.saxena@dalberg.com), **Swetha Totapally** (swetha.totapally@dalberg.com) and **Shruthi Jayaram** (shruthi.jayaram@dalberg.com).