



## A Literature Review on the Gender Division of Unpaid Domestic Care Work

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### Abstract:

*This analytical study examines the persistent gendered division of unpaid domestic care work through a comprehensive review of contemporary literature (2012–2026). Despite the significant influx of women into the global labor market, the "stalled revolution" in the private sphere continues to place a disproportionate burden of housework and caregiving on women. By synthesizing primary theoretical frameworks—Time Availability, Relative Resource, and Doing Gender—this paper analyzes how socio-cultural expectations override economic rationality within the household. Key findings indicate that the "mental load" remains an invisible barrier to gender equality, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of hybrid work models. The paper advocates for the 5R Framework (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Represent) as a necessary structural intervention to achieve substantive gender parity.*

**Keywords:** *Unpaid Care Work, Gender Division Of Labor, Mental Load, Feminist Economics, 5R Framework, Indian Time Use Survey.*

### Introduction:

The division of labor within the private sphere remains one of the most stubborn markers of gender inequality in the 21st century. Unpaid domestic care work—encompassing meal preparation, cleaning, laundry, and the emotional and physical care of children and the elderly—remains heavily gendered. According to the **International Labour Organization (2024)**, women perform approximately 76.2% of total hours of unpaid care work globally.

While the "breadwinner" model has shifted toward dual-earner households, the "stalled revolution" describes a scenario where

women's roles in the public sphere have changed rapidly, but men's roles in the private sphere have changed slowly. This imbalance affects women's mental health, career progression, and economic independence.

### Theoretical Frameworks:

To understand why domestic inequality persists despite women's rising educational status, researchers utilize three primary lenses. These theories explain the tension between economic logic and social performance.

**Table 1: Comparison of Primary Theoretical Frameworks**

Theory	Core Concept	Primary Driver	Key Finding/Limitation
<b>Time Availability</b>	Housework is allocated based on remaining time after market work.	Rational time management.	Often fails to explain why women do more even when working equal hours.
<b>Relative Resource</b>	The partner with more "power" (income) bargains out of chores.	Economic leverage.	High-earning women often do <i>more</i> housework to neutralize gender deviance.
<b>Doing Gender</b>	Domestic work is a symbolic performance of feminine/masculine identity.	Socio-cultural scripts.	Housework is a way to "do womanhood"; avoidance is "doing masculinity."
<b>Cognitive Labor</b>	The "Mental Load" (planning) is distinct from physical labor.	Invisible management.	Women manage nearly all cognitive stages: anticipating, deciding, monitoring.

*Synthesized from Hochschild (2012), West & Zimmerman (1987), and Daminger (2019)*

### The "Invisible" Economy and The Indian Context:

A major theme in feminist economics is the omission of unpaid care work from the System of National Accounts (SNA). Literature

suggests that if unpaid domestic work were assigned a monetary value, it would constitute between 10% and 40% of global GDP. In India, this disparity is among the highest in the world.

**Table 2: Macroeconomic and Global Statistics on Unpaid Care**

Metric	Global Data (2024-2026)	Indian Context (TUS 2019/2025)	Impact on Equality
<b>Total Share of Labor</b>	Women perform <b>76.2%</b> of all unpaid care.	Women: <b>299 mins/day</b> ; Men: <b>97 mins/day</b> .	Creates "time poverty" for women.
<b>Economic Value</b>	Estimated at <b>\$11 Trillion</b> annually.	Estimated between <b>10% and 40%</b> of National GDP.	Labor remains "invisible" in GDP metrics.
<b>Labor Market Barrier</b>	<b>708 million women</b> are prevented from working due to care.	Major factor in declining Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP).	Reinforces the "Motherhood Penalty."

*Data sources: ILO (2024), Oxfam (2020), and MoSPI (2020)*

### Analysis: The Covid-19 Legacy and Hybrid Work:

Recent literature (2024–2026) suggests that the shift to remote work has not equalized the domestic load but has instead made it more pervasive. While some fathers increased participation during lockdowns, the structural

lack of affordable childcare has forced many families back into traditional roles. The "mental load"—the cognitive labor of organizing a household—remains a lead barrier to women's professional advancement, as it continues even during "office hours" in a hybrid setting.

**Policy Recommendations: The 5r Framework:**

The study identifies five key areas for policy intervention to move care work from a private burden to a public responsibility.

**Table 3: The 5R Policy Framework for Structural Change**

Framework Pillar	Action Item	Intended Outcome
<b>Recognize</b>	Time-use surveys and GDP inclusion.	Validate care as an economic contribution.
<b>Reduce</b>	Investment in basic infrastructure (water/tech).	Lessen time spent on basic survival chores.
<b>Redistribute</b>	Paternity leave and public childcare.	Balance the load between genders and the state.
<b>Reward</b>	Living wages for care workers (ASHA workers).	Professionalize and value the care sector.
<b>Represent</b>	Caregiver unions and policy seats.	Ensure policy is made <i>by</i> and <i>for</i> caregivers.

*Adapted from UN Women (2022) and ILO recommendations*

**Conclusion:**

The gender division of unpaid domestic care work is not a private family matter but a public policy crisis. While individual couples may strive for equity, they operate within a system that penalizes care. Achieving parity requires a dual approach: dismantling the "Doing Gender".

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