

Measurement of Unpaid Household Work of Women in India: A Case Study of Hooghly District of West Bengal

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Overview

Question: How does measurement of unpaid work affect estimates of labor force participation, time use, and types and value of unpaid work in Hooghly district of West Bengal that include both rural and urban households?

Data: Time use survey of 400 households using six working-day recall method (excluding Sundays).

Findings: Men specialize in paid work and women in unpaid work; no significant impact on educational attainment; household care activities are a positive but is a declining function of household size and decline as average household expenditure increases.

Motivation

- ▶ Unpaid work performed primarily by women contributes to living standards and economic output.
- ▶ Lack of attention to unpaid work also leads to underestimate of women's labor force participation (e.g., family farm or enterprise)
- ▶ Gendered care responsibilities limit labor force participation and restrict many poor women to poorly-paid home-based employment.

Definitions

Unpaid work: any activity that could, in principle, be performed by someone else for pay (3rd-party criterion).

Unpaid household work: Routine housework, care for children or adults, household construction/repair.

Unpaid social/community/volunteer work.

Survey Details

- ▶ Multi-stage random sampling of households.
- ▶ One adult male and one adult female surveyed from each household (if both are present).
- ▶ The previous 6-day working week.

Survey Results

- ▶ Women's total work day greater than men's overall, especially in rural areas.
- ▶ Coefficient of variation (standardized standard deviation) much higher in rural areas.
- ▶ Coefficient of variation in paid work much higher for women than for men in both rural and urban areas; opposite for unpaid work.
- ▶ Women's education insignificant (non-linear): those with graduate degrees and those who are illiterate both spend about 40 hours per week in unpaid household work.
- ▶ In households where a male earner is missing, women do the least unpaid housework.

Survey Results (cont.)

- ▶ Women also do relative less unpaid household work if age gap is small (33.4 hours per week).
- ▶ But do much more if age gap is larger (both directions - 44.3 hours per week, 43.6 hours per week).
- ▶ Women's employment have very little effect on reducing their unpaid household work.
- ▶ Women's unpaid work lower in households where main earner is self-employed outside of agriculture.
- ▶ Monthly expenditure does not have a continuous effect but a threshold: over 17,000 rupees (appx. 223 euros) per month, there is a reduction in women's unpaid household work.

Replacement Cost Valuation

“Quality-adjusted” replacement cost:

- ▶ Uses the all-India level average wage/salary earnings per day received by regular wage/salaried employees in service-producing activities of private households according to their education level.
- ▶ Per capita value of unpaid work is about 600 rupees per week.

Questions/Comments on Descriptive Results

- ▶ In households where a male earner is missing, women do the least unpaid housework → Do they do proportionately more paid work?
- ▶ Women also do relative less unpaid household work if age gap is small (33.4 hours per week) → More egalitarian marriages or unmeasured demographic differences?
- ▶ Women's employment has very little effect on reducing their unpaid household work → Helpful to get an estimate of the elasticity of unpaid work hours with respect to paid work hours.
- ▶ Value of unpaid work = 600 rupees per week → compared to average wages for women?

Methodological Assessment

Great initiative on local level - India's lack of commitment to a national time use survey (since pilot in 1989-99).

Important insights into survey design and implementation.

Methodological recommendations:

- ▶ Probably best to survey a random day rather than ask for retrospective of week.
- ▶ Do not exclude Sundays.
- ▶ Survey all household members with attention to family relationships.
- ▶ Time of year especially important for rural households.

Theoretical Assessment

- ▶ That women work longer days overall than men now pretty clear; important to ask WHY.
- ▶ Interesting attention here to age differences between spouses.
- ▶ Number of age of children and other dependents - as well as other caregivers.
- ▶ Role of public services and consumer durables.