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Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men:  
Some Issues With Reference to Labour and Employment

Indira Hirway\*

Division for the Advancement of Women  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations, New York  
Fax: (212) 963-3463  
daw@un.org  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw>

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There is increasing awareness about the unjust and unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women and about adverse impact of these on women as well as on the economy and society. There is also global commitment emerging to remove this unequal sharing as reflected in the plans of actions, conventions and recommendations of several global conferences and summits organized during the past decades. In order to enforce these plans of action and recommendations, one needs a strong database to understand the nature of sharing of responsibilities between men and women, and to analyze the impact of the sharing on the society.

This brief paper discusses the nature of the required database and shows how it can help in analyzing the unequal sharing of work as well as its consequences. It also discusses the different approaches adopted by different countries to provide women a level playing field in the labour market.

### **Comprehensive Database:**

Human activities can be broadly divided into the following three categories: *SNA Activities*, i.e. the activities falling within the Production Boundary of the System of National Accounts<sup>1</sup> (i.e. SNA activities or paid activities): These activities are covered under national accounts, which provide full details of the national economy; *Non-SNA Activities* falling outside the SNA Production Boundary but within the General Production Boundary<sup>2</sup>: these unpaid services, which are frequently described as ‘care activities’ include home management and housekeeping (i.e. cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping for own family); care of children, the old, the sick and disabled household members; shopping and other services for the household; and voluntary and community services; and *Personal Services*, i.e. activities which cannot be delegated to others, such as learning, studying, personal hygiene related activities, sleeping, eating etc, which cannot be delegated to others. All the three categories of activities contribute to human well-being and are important to understand the human society. All the three categories of activities however are distributed highly unequally between the two sexes.

Interestingly, there is no water tight compartment between these activities. For example, SNA and non-SNA activities move from one to the other category under different socioeconomic situations. The same set of activities may be covered under SNA in one economy or during one period and under non SNA under another situation. Child care, cooking, washing etc, which are carried out within homes in developing countries are many times market activities in developed countries. Similarly a personal activity can move to the market or to non-SNA category under specific situation. For example, the rich like to get their personal care related activities by hired servants. An important question therefore is what determines the demarcation between SNA and

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<sup>1</sup> The Production Boundary as per the 1993 SNA includes production of all goods and the production of all services except personal and domestic services produced for own final consumption within households (other than the services of owner occupiers of housing and of those produced by employing paid domestic staff (UN 1993)).

<sup>2</sup> An activity is included in General Production Boundary when (1) it is carried out under the control and responsibility of an institutional unit exercising ownership rights on what is produced (natural processes without any human involvement are excluded) and (2) there is marketability of being exchanged though actual exchange is not necessary. (UN 1993)

non SNA activities at the household level and at the macro level. It is important to understand the dynamics of the changes to understand the total economy and society better.

The conventional database as available in most countries, however, does not provide comprehensive information on all these activities. It covers mainly the first category of activities, i.e. the activities covered under the national income accounts. This database provides only a partial picture of the society and is far from adequate to understand the total society. Time use survey, a relatively new survey method, however can provide comprehensive information on all the categories of work.

### **Time Use Surveys**

Time use surveys collect detailed information on how individuals spend their time, on a daily or weekly basis and provide a comprehensive view of human activities. They reveal the details of an individual's life with a combination of specificity and comprehensiveness not achieved in any other type of survey. The UN Statistical Commission 1979, in its report on Status of Work on Time Use Statistics, described time use statistics as “fundamental descriptive data not otherwise obtainable on human activities in the various field of social, demographic and related economic statistics” (UN 1979). Time use statistics engender the national database, as it is women, whose work and whose contribution to human well being through multiple activities is either under recorded or not recorded in a typical national database.

Time use statistics are quantitative summaries of how individuals spend or allocate their time over a specified time period – typically over the 24 hours of a day or over the 7 days of a week on different activities and how much time they spend on each of these activities. Information provided by time use statistics has three major components: (1) information on individuals, such as age, sex, education, marital status, income etc as well as their households collected through the background schedule, (2) time spent by individuals on different activities like economic activities, non-economic activities, personal care etc, and (3) the context in which the activities are carried out. The context variables in time use statistics usually refer to the location where the activity took place (where), the presence of other people when the activity took place (with whom), the beneficiary, person or institution of the activity (for whom the activity was carried out), the motivation of the activity (for example, whether the activity was paid or unpaid) etc.

Time use data also provide information on multi-tasking, i.e. activities carried out simultaneously, which is usually done by women and which creates time stress. Classification of time use activities, like classification of economic activities, present time use activities in a proper perspective.

### **Analyzing Time Use Data for Understanding Sharing of Responsibilities by Men and Women for Labour Market Analysis**

*Time Use Data Measure All Forms of Work:* Time use data provide comprehensive information on all forms of work, and thereby provide full visibility to women's (and men's) remunerated and unremunerated SNA and non-SNA work. This provides quantitative visibility to unequal sharing of total work as well as paid and unpaid work by men and women, and to the predominance of women in unpaid work. Unpaid work, however, has lower status in the hierarchy of work, because (1) it is not remunerated directly, (2) it has limited / no scope for upward mobility, (3) it has usually low productivity, in fact it usually involves drudgery and (4)

unpaid workers have limited scope for acquiring human capital and human capabilities. Unpaid workers thus experience an inferior status within home as well as outside home.

*Time Use Data Provide Improved Estimates of Workforce and Particularly female Workforce:* It is observed by scholars that SNA work is frequently not captured adequately by conventional labour force surveys, largely due to the conceptual and methodological limitations of these surveys. This work includes informal work as well as subsistence work, which is now included in the definition of national income under the 1993 SNA, and which is predominantly performed by women. Since informal sector activities are frequently short term, scattered and sporadic in nature, the usual labour force surveys find it difficult to capture these. In addition, there are several socio-cultural values that prevent women respondents as well as investigators from reporting their SNA activities correctly. The subsistence sector, which produces goods for self-consumption, is usually excluded from the purview of conventional labour force surveys. However, time use surveys, which collect comprehensive information how people spend their time on different activities, provide complete data on informal and subsistence work performed by people. With proper classification of activities and suitable context variables, these data can provide accurate estimates of economic activities covered under the production boundaries of the UN-SNA (Hirway and Charmes 2007). Improved workforce estimates can also provide the details of under-employment of women and men in terms of days and hours of work.

*Time Use Data provide Improved Estimates of National GDP:* There are two ways in which time use data can be used to get improved GDP estimates: (1) improved estimates of workforce, particularly engaged in the informal sector activities, can help in getting improved estimates of the contribution of these activities to the national GDP, as in several countries these estimates are calculated using the workforce data, and (2) the GDP from the subsistence sector can be calculated using the time spent and number of workers engaged in this work. These improvements underscore the contribution of women workers to the national GDP.

*Time Use Data can be used in Compiling Satellite Accounts of Unpaid non-SNA Work:* Time use data, which provide estimates of the time spent by women (and men) on unpaid domestic services and community services (i.e. non-SNA work), can be used in the valuation of this work in Satellite Accounts. Though there are several conceptual and methodological issues not yet sorted out and not harmonized at the global level, several countries have compiled satellite accounts to quantify the contribution of this unpaid work in money terms. These estimates provide quantitative measures of contribution of men and mainly women to the total well-being at the national level, and thereby draw attention to the significance of women's contribution to total well-being.

*Time Use Data Reveal Intra-Household Inequalities:* Time use surveys are perhaps the only survey available to us at present which provides useful insights into the dynamics of sharing of paid and unpaid work by men and women within a household. When the time use data of men and women are analyzed in the context of the household characteristics as well as individual characteristics, they reveal the nature and causes of the sharing of different categories of work by men and women at the household level. This understanding is useful in analyzing the functioning of the labour market for men and women.

*Time Use Data Throw Light on Time Stress and Time Poverty of Women Workers:* In addition to the above, an in-depth analysis of time use data can provide many other useful insights about the constraints of women workers in the labour market:

- It can throw light on the unequal personal time available to men and women, and reveal whether women get less time for sleep & rest, and for acquiring personal capabilities like education and skills, health care etc.
- It can quantify the nature and extent of burden of work on women and men, as well as measure their time stress and time poverty.
- Since time use data can measure intensity of work (through multi-tasking), they can throw light on the depletion of human capital of women through the high intensity of work.

In short, proper analysis of time use data can throw useful light on the nature and extent of all pervasive inequalities in the labour market and in the economy.

### **Impact of Unequal Sharing of Responsibilities on Labour and Employment**

A major consequence of the unequal sharing of responsibilities by men and women is that women enter the labour market with the burden of unpaid domestic work on their shoulder. This denies them a level playing field in the labour market. This has multiple consequences on the status as well as prospects of women in the labour market.

*Low Workforce Participation Rate:* The burden of domestic work including the care of children, the old, the sick and the disabled in the household results in their lower participation in the labour market. This low participation is low in terms of number as well as days / hours of work. In fact, time use data have shown that the latter is more prevalent than the former.

*Higher Incidence of Unemployment/ Underemployment:* A consequence of low workforce participation and low intensity of work, women suffer from a higher incidence of underemployment as compared to men.

*Low Time, Energy and Priority to Market Work:* Because of the domestic responsibilities women usually have less time and energy as well as low priority for the market work. They are not in a position to access labour market opportunities as much as men are.

*Poor Education and Skill Development:* The domestic responsibilities of women and girls at home do not allow them to access equal opportunities with men for acquiring education and skills. In addition, skill training organized by employers is not always accessible to women due to their burden of domestic work and limited mobility. In other words, women are left behind men in terms of improving their capabilities in the labour market. The results in their overcrowding in stereotyped jobs, in low productivity low wage jobs. Women are subjected to segregation in the labour market resulting in the low diversification in their economic activities.

*Low Mobility:* Domestic responsibilities frequently do not allow women to be mobile in their market job, horizontally and vertically. It deprives them opportunities to take up responsible jobs. Again, due to the inferior status at home, women frequently tend to be meek and docile and show inability to take up responsible jobs.

*Low Wages Leading to Wide Gender Gaps in Wages:* Labour market segregation and labour market discrimination tend to lower the wage rate received by women. That is, women are over crowding in low productivity jobs on the one hand and discrimination against them in the labour market on the other hand lowers the average wage rate received by women. It needs to be noted that the discrimination happens largely because of the segmentation of the labour market for women, where the segmentation arises due to the specific supply side behaviour of women.

*Informalization of Women's Employment:* Women's flexible labour supply emanating from their double burden fits very well in the flexible labour market structures that are emerging in the competitive environment of the post globalization period. The increasing workforce participation rates of women in export industries in newly industrializing countries have put women in a highly disadvantageous position in the labour market, i.e. in subcontracted home work, part time work, temporary and short term work, piece rated work – all of which leading to over crowding in low wage, low productivity work with no social protection. As wage earners they experience poor quality of employment, and as self employed they have a poor access to credit, skill training etc. In both the cases, women suffer from poor opportunities to grow.

*Difficult Re-entry in Labour Market:* Due to their reproductive role, women tend to withdraw from the labour market when children are small. They find it difficult, however, to re-enter the market when children are grown and they can afford to take up a job. This is observed to be a major constraint of women's opportunities in the labour market.

*Globalization and Women's Employment:* The neo-liberal policy package introduced in many countries in the recent years have accentuated the labour market forces working against women. Studies have shown that women are the first to lose job when units restructure, downsize or close under the pressure of trade liberalization. And even when women gain in terms of higher employment due to expansion of the global market, they lose in terms of rapidly declining quality of their employment. It has been observed by several studies that the gender gaps in the major labour market outcomes have increased under the neo-liberal policy regime.

In short, unequal sharing of responsibilities at home is reflected in almost all the dimensions in the labour market. It restricts women's access as well as their growth in the labour market.

### **Policies for Integration**

How can women be helped in having equitable access to developmental opportunities in the labour market? The policies used by different countries for integrating paid and unpaid work for promoting integration of women in the labour market can be divided in to the following broad categories.

**Family Friendly Work policies:** Family friendly work policies attempt to help women to balance work and family. This can be done by (a) reducing the time demands on paid work, (b) reducing rigidities of paid employment time schedule (c) reducing gap between work and family and by (d) child care programmes and schemes.

*Reducing the Time Demands on Paid Work:* This approach attempts to reduce the time demanded on paid work so that the total burden of women is reduced. *Part Time Work* is the most popular solution to work-family conflicts used by many countries. However this solution is not fully satisfactory because part time work usually has (1) less job security, (2) poor social protection and has (3) lower earnings. Part time workers tend to be less organized and therefore have low bargaining power. Part time employment also tends to be precarious as any crisis or down sizing throws them out first. *Job Sharing*, another approach of reducing time demand from women, involves arrangements to share a full time position by two employees. Though this approach seems to be helping women, in reality there are not many jobs that can be shared like this.

*Reducing Rigidities of Paid Employment Time Schedule:* The two common approaches used here are *Flexi time* of work and *compressed work week* ( for example, four days of 10 hours work in the place of five days of 8 hours work). *Family leave provision* is another measure that allows women and men to reduce the time demands on paid work. Under this provision parents, mainly mothers, are allowed to take leave to take care of young children or even sick adults in some cases. Though this provision helps mothers, it reconfirms women's lesser commitment to work. Also, this leave is unpaid in most cases.

*Reducing Gap Between Work and Family:* Under this approach, the gap between women's work and family is reduced by providing work at home, mainly as subcontracted work. This approach has a relatively higher acceptability as it also removes the burden of employers of providing work site. *Homework and home-based work* are frequently seen as solutions of balancing work and family. At a high level of technology there are activities like tele-commuting and tele-working getting popular while at the lower end of the technology there are home workers engaged in contracted and sub contracted work in export based industries like garments. However, advantages of such arrangements are frequently doubted on the grounds that (1) such workers are frequently exploited in terms of wages, (2) such work tends to intrude in to family life, and in the case of developing countries it encourages children to work on these on long hours and (3) such work usually does not carry any social protection etc.

*Child Care Programmes and Schemes:* Another set of policies that enables women to balance family and work are in the area of child care. *Child care facilities* are usually provided at work sites or near to work sites to reduce the gap between work and family. It is noted, however, that such facilities when prescribed from employers under a legal act tends to discourage employers from employing mothers. A few countries therefore have introduced general schemes for women employees in industrial centres or in office complexes, which are funded by employers, irrespective of the fact that they employ women, employees and government. *Maternity Cost Sharing and Leave:* is one of the most common schemes adopted by many countries, though the coverage of this scheme is limited in developing countries. Paternity leave also has been introduced in several countries to underline the fact that children are responsibilities of both, father and mother. *School Lunch Programmes* like Mid day meal programmes for elementary school children, provision of nutritious food for babies in day care centres, etc tend to reduce the responsibilities of mothers enabling them to participate in the labour market activities.

**Policies for Promoting Skills and Employment:** Another set of policies is to promote employment and skills of women through special programmes and schemes so as to enable them

to improve their status in the labour market. The various policies and approaches are broadly as follow:

*Preference to women in public sector jobs* or government jobs is given by several national governments and provincial governments. This is a positive discrimination for promoting women's access to job market.

*Promotion of human resource development of girls before and after they enter the labour market* to enable them to get higher productivity jobs and upward mobility is being done in several countries by promoting girls' skill formation in non-traditional skills at the school and university levels by providing subsidy in tuition fees, special quota for girls in non traditional skill training, special allowances for books, equipments etc; organizing special skill training, programmes, management development programmes and professional programmes for women.

*Special support to women in re-entering the labour market*, after children have grown up, by providing them skill training, information about jobs as well as preference in public sector jobs help women to rejoin the labour market.

*Promoting women workers in self employment:* Women, as self employed workers, suffer from several constraints to grow. They can be helped by improving their access to credit and finance, markets, raw materials etc. facilities; to skill formation and skill up gradation, management training, and other professional training; to labour market information etc through specially designed programmes. Support can be provided to NGOs who are organizing women workers for their development and empowerment.

**Financial Compensation and Financial Incentives:** Financial compensation and incentives are provided to women workers in several countries (mainly in industrialized countries) for taking care of family, which is a social responsibility. Some of the schemes implemented in different countries are listed below.

*Compensating women workers for the absence from work for child bearing and child rearing:* This is done by providing paid maternity leave and medical allowances to meet the cost of child birth; paternity leave to enable fathers to contribute to baby care and care of the mother; and special nursing breaks as well as extra leave till the child becomes two years old.

*Providing financial incentives to women workers* for taking care of children and dependence by child care tax credit and dependent care tax credit to be given to workers whenever it can be given,

*Equal Pay Act or Equal Remuneration Act* to ensure that women do not get lower salary or lower benefits due to their responsibility of taking care of children and dependants.

*Provision of social security and assistance* to women workers for taking care of children and dependents.

*Providing financial incentives like tax incentives to employers* or companies that follow family friendly policies is also a practice adopted by some countries.

To sum up, women can be helped in managing the dual responsibilities by family friendly policies; can be compensated for undertaking the dual responsibilities and the losses occurring due to this; and can be assisted in overcoming their constraints in the labour market by promotional policies for skill formation and employment so that they can be on equal footing to access opportunities.

The success of these policies can be measured by (1) whether women workers have a choice to select the programmes and (2) whether programmes are comprehensive enough to integrate women in the labour market. Frequently, these programmes are observed to be scattered and ad hoc, and women workers do not have a choice to decide their own programme. There is a need to develop these strategies to their logical end to ensure comprehensive integration.

In the final analysis, however, it needs to be underlined that women cannot be integrated completely by any or all the interventions discussed above. What is needed is a democratic family as against a patriarchal family to provide level playing field to women in the labour market. When the success of these policies is assessed by (1) whether women workers have a choice to select the programmes and (2) whether programmes are comprehensive enough to integrate women in the labour market, it is observed that these programmes are frequently scattered and ad hoc, and women workers do not have a choice to decide their own programme. There is a need to develop these strategies to their logical end to ensure comprehensive integration.

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