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The Daily Star



# Importance of care economy to reduce domestic violence against women and girls

The Daily Star in association with Manusher Jonno Foundation organised a roundtable titled "Importance of care economy to reduce domestic violence against women and girls" on December 8, 2021. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



**DR SAYEMA HAQUE BIDISHA,**  
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Bangladesh has performed impressively in different socio-economic indicators. However, there remain many challenges and much more work to be done for women's empowerment. One area is women's economic contribution and participation in the labour market. Women spend a significant time, not only on market activities but also on non-market activities which are often not accounted for in the GDP calculation. Therefore, those involved in non-market activities are not considered as part of the labour force. Even this type of work is usually not considered to be actual "work".

Why is it so important to talk about work that is unaccounted for done by women? It will help us recognise all types of work and ensure the dignity of labour. Such recognition can raise women's position in society and help reduce domestic violence. Women's care responsibilities often create hindrances to their participation in the labour market and their performance in workplaces. It also has an impact on their health and productivity that we often overlook. The Gender Budget report of the Ministry of Finance clearly highlights the importance of care responsibilities carried out by women. SDG 5 also emphasises the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work. The unaccounted work of women is also closely related to achieving other SDGs and targets (such as 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 8.5, 8.6). Finally, the care sector can be a potential source of employment for women since job opportunity in the garments sector is declining gradually. It will also help diversify women's employment opportunities.

In order to recognise unaccounted work, it is important to first recognise its value, reduce these responsibilities on women and redistribute the work. Women's 'economic contribution' can be broadly classified into three categories: paid work, unpaid family work, and unpaid, unrecognised and unaccounted domestic work. Paid work (wage and self-employment) is included in national accounts and those involved in it are considered to be part of the labour force. Unpaid family work is included in the national accounts; those involved are part of the labour force but women don't get any remuneration. Finally, unpaid, unrecognised and unaccounted domestic work is not marketed, not considered as an economic activity and not accounted for in the GDP and labour force.

The VAW survey of 2015 showed that 72.6 percent of ever-married women experienced violence at the hands of their husband at least once in their lifetime (sexual, physical, economic, emotional) and 54.7 percent experienced violence during the last 12 months.

If we look at the linkage between violence against women, care work and mainstream market work, we will see that for paid work, non-partner violence can affect the efficiency and performance of women. It can also create a hindrance to their upward mobility in the occupational ladder. If women face violence at the hands of their partners, it can affect their performance, efficiency, and they even might have to withdraw themselves from paid work. In the case of unpaid care work, partner violence can affect women's quality of care work and can affect the human capital formation of young members of the family.

We conducted a study in collaboration with the Manusher Jonno Foundation on the unaccounted work of women. We found that if we could estimate the economic value of the unaccounted work, it would help create recognition for the work. If we consider the labour force survey of 2016-17, we will see that the unaccounted work constitutes 40 percent of the GDP of that year.

I have several recommendations regarding the recognition of women's unaccounted work and prevention of violence against women. First, we need a comprehensive database with a time diary, that is regularly updated, to estimate women's unaccounted work. The government should undertake necessary policy steps to reform the estimation practices of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and incorporate a satellite account. The government should also invest in infrastructure such as water facilities that can ease women's domestic

and care responsibilities. The government should provide policy and resource support to initiatives such as daycare centres (both community and institutional), maternity leave and childcare vouchers. Fiscal incentives such as tax rebate and credit facilities are needed to incentivise the private sector to ensure these facilities.

Care service should be brought into the mainstream labour market. Gender budget can serve as a crucial policy tool for integrating care work into the policy agenda. The government can play a vital role in providing the required education and training to create human resources for the care economy. Home-based care services also need to be improved so that trained men and women can participate in these jobs and work in a secure and professional environment.



**SHAHEEN ANAM,**  
Executive Director,  
Manusher Jonno  
Foundation

For many years, MJF has been working to highlight the unrecognised contribution of women to the economy in the form of unpaid care work. Women's lower status, which often leads to domestic violence, is due to the lack of recognition and undervaluation of their work at home as home makers. Proper valuation and formal recognition should be given to behind the scenes contribution of women in various fields such as agriculture, home based enterprises, poultry, etc.

One way of formal recognition is through inclusion of women's unpaid care work in the GDP. But this is difficult as we would have to take the market value according to international standards. That is why we are now focusing on using the satellite account system which has been adapted by many countries. This satellite account system is a

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- > A regular and comprehensive database with a time diary needs to be maintained to estimate women's unaccounted work.
- > Incorporate a satellite account into the national account that will demonstrate the economic value of women's unaccounted work.
- > The government should invest in infrastructure such as water facilities and day care centres that can ease women's domestic and care responsibilities.
- > Care service should be brought into the mainstream labour market.
- > Introduce day care facilities in all workplaces.
- > Private and public organisations should provide gender sensitivity training to both male and female employees.
- > A gender-friendly environment in educational institutions and workplaces must be ensured.
- > The gender budget can serve as a crucial policy tool for integrating care work into the policy agenda.
- > Safety net programmes can be expanded to incorporate care work.
- > A gender-sensitive curriculum needs to be introduced in educational institutions.

parallel accounting system which will give an estimation of the contribution of women's unpaid labour to the GDP. However, the recognition of unpaid labour alone will not reduce violence against women, but it will be a step towards acknowledging their contribution.

Simultaneously, we must create social awareness about the importance of care work. In SDG 5, it is clearly mentioned that the care economy is absolutely critical for sustainable development.

Often, women themselves undervalue their work. When I ask any woman who is a homemaker what they do, their usual response is that they don't do anything. We need to change this narrative, either by providing a salary for their unpaid labour or through giving it the prestige and due recognition. The care economy can be a big source of employment for our country, but we have to change our mentality about care work. Until and unless we dignify these jobs, women will continue to face violence and discrimination at home.

During the pandemic, women's workload increased significantly. If we support women by making institutional changes to reduce their burden of work, then we can help them find more opportunities to participate in the economy.

Manusher Jonno Foundation's research findings showed that violence against women at home increased manifold during the pandemic. Therefore, the empowerment of women through the care economy is even more vital. The government has taken the initiative to conduct a national time-use survey, which will estimate the real time work of women daily. Once this is completed, we can incorporate this data into a satellite account system to formally value

the contribution of women's unpaid care work to the GDP. If this is done successfully, then the next step will be to take this data to the policy makers so that the necessary steps can be taken towards giving the care economy the importance it deserves.



**DR SOMA DEY,**  
Associate Professor,  
Women and Gender  
Studies, University of  
Dhaka

A substantial economic transformation has taken place in Bangladesh during the last couple of decades, and women have played an instrumental role in this. Women are now directly engaged in many economic activities as paid workers. Simultaneously, our average life expectancy has risen. Therefore, the number of ageing people has also increased. As a result, the scope of the care economy has continued to increase.

At present, as both men and women tend to work outside of their homes, the number of day care centres and facilities needs to be increased. However, even though women are working outside, the burden of work at home has largely remained unchanged. Recognition of care work at home is needed to formally provide it with a value in the market. Once this value is established, it would also encourage men to work in the care economy alongside women.

We need vibrant campaigns to raise awareness regarding gender sensitivity, and to ensure a safe environment for women both in their homes and their workplaces. The media has an important role here. It can disseminate information about the importance of the care economy and caregiving activities to the mass audience.

Moreover, our educational curriculum needs to be revised to include these issues. We should educate the next generation about gender disparity and help them

understand the importance of eliminating the stereotypical mindset about gender roles and care work.



**UDISA ISLAM,**  
Journalist, Bangla  
Tribune

Sometimes it can be difficult for the general people to understand terms such as caregiver, care economy, care worker, etc. I think we should simplify these terms so that more people can easily understand and become aware of the importance of care work.

I have two suggestions. The first is to ensure that these topics are included in school textbooks. There are no alternatives to textbooks, and young children listen to the advice of their teachers more than that of their parents.

The other suggestion is for day care facilities to be introduced in all the workplaces. It is not very difficult to allocate one corner of the office for day care facilities. If needed, employees can bear the additional costs, but the facilities should be in place.



**NAZNIN AKHTER,**  
Journalist, Prothom  
Alo

Women themselves struggle to imagine being paid for the work they do at home. I believe that this will slowly start to change, and we might even see an improvement in the next 10 years.

As a journalist, some questions come to mind. For example, if I'm unemployed and a homemaker, then how do we distinguish this from care work? How do we include the unpaid labour of women in the GDP?



**SHUPROVA TASNEEM,**  
Journalist,  
The Daily Star

When talking about the burden of homemaking, a large portion of it falls upon women. I believe that every organisation needs to provide gender-sensitivity training to ensure that their employees, both male and female, understand that this burden should be shared equally.

The media has a major role to play here. For a long time, we have normalised and even promoted gender stereotypes through ads, movies, TV shows, etc. We must change this image now, and instead promote the understanding that children and families are the responsibility of both the husband and the wife.



**UMMEWARA,**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of  
Criminology, Dhaka  
University

We have a deep-rooted perception that domestic work is women's work. As a result, women do not get any appreciation for the work they do at home. Husbands, on the other hand, do not think they are responsible for domestic work, so whenever they participate, they only see it as them doing a favour to their wives. Even families tend to glorify husbands who engage in domestic work.

In order to reduce domestic violence, we must recognise the care economy. We need to establish social recognition and legal recognition. Section 19 of our constitution says, "The State shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and man and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic." Now, to what extent the state has succeeded in doing so remains a question.

Section 20 also bears an important principle: "Work is a right, a duty and a matter of honour for every citizen who is capable of working, and everyone shall be paid for his work on the basis of the principle 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work.'" Whilst we are not yet ready to consider the concept of formal payment in return for the unpaid labour of women at home, we cannot deny the importance of financial emancipation. Thus, such recognition is extremely important in both legal and social spheres. Affirmative discrimination is necessary through policy implementation, in accordance with our constitution.

The patriarchy harms all of society and breeds a lack of confidence in young girls through the reinforcement of gender roles. Men assume that when women speak of their struggles, they are belittling the struggles of men.

Sometimes, in classrooms, male students ask me why female students are even enrolled in the subject of criminology since they will not be able to chase criminals. We cannot change the mindsets of these boys now that they are grown up. However, if boys and girls witness their parents handling domestic chores and their careers together, they will develop a different mindset. Countries where education is said to be of the highest quality such as Finland, New Zealand and Denmark do not pay much attention to meritocracy in schools. Instead, they are more concerned with ethics, values, gender equality, sex education, etc. We can learn from their experiences.

Friedrich Engels said, "The emancipation of women will only be possible when a

woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time." When women are financially emancipated, they can hold power in their families and create more democratic arrangements in their homes. There cannot possibly be a democratic structure in a society where women's domestic labour goes unappreciated and unpaid. Thus, we need to change this dynamic by empowering women, not just here, but in the rural areas and remote villages as well. Every woman needs to realise that their work is important for the economic development of our nation.



**PROFESSOR GOLAM RAHMAN,**  
Editor, Aiker Patrika

The concept of the care economy is extremely relevant for our contemporary society. We need to understand how to redefine homemaking and caregiving and realise the economic contribution of such domestic labour. The media should also highlight the importance of care work.

I believe that content creators like us need to bring about the necessary changes in the media when it comes to presentation of gender roles. We need to address gender inequality and violence against women in a more comprehensive manner.



**SHAHANA HUDA,**  
Senior Coordinator,  
Manusher Jonno  
Foundation

Both male and female employees should be provided with day care facilities for their children if needed. In the case of children's sickness, both the parents should be able to take leave if necessary.

Previously, we used to advise women in Uthan Baithaks (awareness-raising sessions), whether it be about family planning, religious responsibilities, or agriculture. Now, we have brought changes to our methods as we now involve their husbands in the conversations, too. We call this men-boys engagement. Respecting women is not something you can train into an adult. Children, especially boys, must be brought up having witnessed and taught these ideologies. We have chosen Duranta TV for our programme, so that children can participate and be the agents of change.

Even in remote villages, women have more agency when they gain financial emancipation, which is necessary if we want things to change at large.



**SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN,**  
Commercial  
Supplements Editor,  
The Daily Star &  
Moderator of the  
Session

The care economy is growing as the demand for childcare and care for the elderly increases in all regions. It will create a significant number of jobs in the coming years. However, care work across the world remains characterised by a void of benefits and protections, low wages or non-compensation, and exposure to physical, mental and, in some cases, sexual harm. New solutions to care work are needed on two fronts: the nature and provision of care policies and services, and the terms and conditions of care work. Both the government and private sector need to invest in the care economy as it has three winning points: a win for children, gender equality, and the economy. Redistribution of care work by engaging men and boys in care and domestic work can bring actual change in the care economy. The explicit inclusion of unpaid care and domestic work in SDG 5 (target 5.4) which calls to "recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies" highlights the importance of including care policies in governments' agendas.