



Women's unpaid work creates the gender pay gap by limiting women's ability to employ their time and energy on outside work, as emphasised by Goldin.
VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Our gender pay gap is fixable

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Claudia Goldin, the first female tenured professor in the economics department of Harvard University, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics this year. She is the third woman to receive this honour – and the first to not be sharing it with a male researcher. The award recognises her lifelong work examining the wage inequality between men and women, and explaining how women's labour force participation evolves over the different development stages of an economy in interaction with its culture.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said on October 16 that Goldin's research "provided the first comprehensive account of women's earnings and labour market participation through the centuries" to reveal "the causes of change, as well as the main sources of the remaining gender gap," illuminating the pivotal wage difference that emerges among couples after having the first child.

For the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), women's empowerment and gender equality has always been a central research theme. And the insights we gleaned and the data we collected from more than a decade of work in Bangladesh are clearly aligned with what Goldin has established through her body of research on women's work.

To begin with, the late BIGD researcher Simeen Mahmud, one of the foremost Bangladeshi female social science researchers of her time, used data to show that the vast economic value women create through their unpaid productive and care work is completely unrecognised in their families, the society, and national statistics. Women's childcare responsibility – that is, unpaid work – thus not only creates the gender pay gap by limiting women's ability to employ their time and energy on outside work, as emphasised by Goldin, but when unrecognised as an economic contribution, it keeps them disempowered.

The gender gap in labour market participation has narrowed in Bangladesh over the last half century; however, it is still very wide at 43 percent for women and 81 percent for men, according to the latest Labour Force Survey. It is not unreasonable to assume that women's participation grows as they become more educated and urban, and the country becomes richer. But contrary to this common sense understanding, in Bangladesh, like in many other developing countries, their participation is higher in villages than in cities and among women with little to no education compared to those with secondary to higher secondary level education. And the growth in women's labour force participation has also slowed down in recent years after consistently increasing in the 80s and 90s, even though the country's economic growth remains robust. The national surveys and findings from different BIGD studies have repeatedly documented these trends.

These trends are also consistent with Professor Goldin's arguments, based on empirical evidence, regarding women's work in different economic stages of a country. Many women in poor, agricultural societies participate in the labour force out of sheer necessity. As the economy grows and becomes more urban, the better-off conditions of many households may reduce the need for women to work outside; these women may also find it undignified to engage in industrial, poorly paid jobs which are offered in abundance in intermediate economies like Bangladesh. Only when women are highly educated and can find better-paid, professional jobs can they

Even in sectors where women dominate the workforce, they struggle to move up the career ladder. The readymade garments (RMG) sector is a case in point. Most women in RMG work on the factory floor while the supervisory and managerial roles are male-dominated. Even when women are qualified, they are frequently turned down from being promoted to supervisory roles, primarily because they may not be able to put in the time demanded of the role due to their responsibilities at home. Some even opt out of promotions voluntarily.

break the norms that want to keep them indoors. This is exactly what BIGD researcher Lopita Haque found in her collaborative study with Naila Kabeer of the London School of Economics and Mahabub Rahman of Comilla University in 2021.

Like Goldin's work, one BIGD study found that the gender wage gap is minimal or non-existent within a specific job and level, but on average, women earn less than men. The conflict between the two findings can be explained by the type of work opportunities available for women due to both gender norms and educational disparities.

Generally, occupations that are typically "feminine" are also considered less prestigious and pay less. As explained, higher education opens up women's world of work, but women in Bangladesh are half as likely to attain tertiary education compared to men.

The first consequence of the social expectations about appropriate jobs for women, often shared by women themselves, is the predominance of home-based, informal, and often unpaid nature

of women's work. Going outside and working alongside men is deemed inappropriate by many, especially in professions with lower social status, forcing most Bangladeshi women with some means and some education to find productive work in the confines of home (Haq, et al, 2021). For those who work outside due to necessity, societal norms and their own skill levels narrow down their options. The professional options for women are limited to those deemed suitable for women, like teaching and nursing.

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This sad reality of women's career trajectories is firmly rooted in society's expectations from women. The survey on time use, by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, shows us that even women with paid jobs do many more extra hours of care work in a day than the men in their households. This is where Goldin's idea of the "motherhood penalty" surfaces in the real lives of Bangladeshi women.

It is evident that much of the disparities women face in the labour market stem from cultural norms. So, ultimately, these norms must change for better economic outcomes. But norms change very slowly, if at all.

Goldin shows that such change takes generations. Often, a mother steps on the first rung of the economic ladder by fighting adversities, and then the daughter pushes it to the higher rung, gaining confidence and support from her mother. With more and more women coming outside, the process is slowly but surely taking place in Bangladesh, too.

But this must be facilitated and accelerated by investing in women's education and challenging the stereotyping of "good jobs" for women, so that all jobs are open to them. This also involves finding developing sectors that consider women's realities. For example, professionalising care work, which is in increasing demand, can create job opportunities for women. Simultaneously, if women can earn from home and at flexible hours, they feel that it can help them balance their personal and work lives. A BIGD evaluation of training underprivileged women on online freelancing found that this flexibility is indeed a valuable consideration for women to participate in the formal labour market. Though working from home is not as empowering as working outside, it is a start.

But, most importantly, the society and state need to take greater child-rearing responsibility, it cannot be the sole responsibility of the mother. It will need men to share greater childcare and household responsibilities, and the state and employers to create low-cost childcare and after-school facilities so that women do not have to make the painful choice between a child and a job.

Free pages, free lenses



KNOT SO TRUE

Dr Rubana Huq is the vice-chancellor of Asian University for Women.

RUBANA HUQ

In most parts of the world, editors are often requested to halt or alter a piece to be published. In cases of critical coverage, he or she is even attempted to be silenced or replaced. The methods of intervention range from a phone call to the editor followed by their media outlet being discredited and journalists being subjected to verbal and physical threats.

There's a reason why, between 2016 and 2021, 455 reporters died (according to Unesco), while 73 percent of 625 women journalists surveyed by the International Center for Journalists in 2020 experienced online violence, with nine out of ten cases remaining unsolved. There's a reason why only a few thousand stories see the light of the day and a million or more don't. There's a reason why some stories come dressed in propaganda, and some never get told in the absence of a

her hands and legs for almost eight hours and strangled her when she refused to give up the passwords to her phones.

There's a reason why Sandhya Ravishankar from Tamil Nadu was subjected to online harassment, death threats, rape threats, and doxing and why, in terms of freedom of press ranking, her country slipped to 161 from 150 in 2022, out of 180 countries, over the span of a year. There's a reason why Katsiaryna Barysevich, a Belarusian journalist, got arrested on November 19, 2020 after having written an article on the death of a man who had protested and demanded the resignation of President Aleksandr Lukashenko, and was charged for "violating medical confidentiality with grave consequences."

There's a reason why, in the land that we live on, 217 journalists have

news on a student wing of a political party. At Ham, in broad daylight, Mosharraf was punched, kicked, and beaten mercilessly.

This overall deterioration of the spirit of free media should not only be attributed to governments' desire to control. In spite of instructions, directives, and powerful phone calls from powerful places, there are pens that fight against injustices, corruption, and human rights violations; there are papers that expose the ploys of greed and cruelty; there are lenses that attempt to capture real moments. The real weakness lies in those of us who cave in to calls to drop stories or rescript them.

The practice of running blank editorials as a mark of protest occurred in Ukraine in 2012, Hungary, Estonia and Bolivia in 2010, Slovakia in 1997 and, much before any of them, in India in 1975. All the newspapers in India ran a blank editorial space on June 28, 1975, representing the censorship by the then government in the name of Emergency. The refusal to pen a column that day spoke for the entire Indian nation. That is how a whole nation came together back then.

Most unfortunately, today, the Free Press has taken the stand and is being charged for killing the rhetoric



FILE PHOTO: AFP

Today, in this shrunken courtroom of this world, Free Press is being hunted down and sent to oblivion.

good storyteller; why some go viral, and some are swept under the rug. Some just never get written.

He worked as a human rights advocate and was part of a local civil society organisation that used people to become citizen journalists. He was a reporter, a news presenter, and he was last seen leaving his workplace at 7pm on April 7, 2020. His last text said that he was surrounded by soldiers. There's a reason why Ibrahim Abú Mbaruco from North Mozambique went missing.

He was covering a violent dispersal of protests staged by members of the Gonabadi dervishes, a Sufi splinter group. It was February 19, 2018. There's a reason why Kasra Nouri, an Iranian journalist was sentenced to 12 years in prison, 74 lashes, two years in exile in a remote city, a two-year ban on political, social, and media activities, and a two-year ban on travelling outside Iran.

She was an Egyptian blogger, an internet activist, a social media coordinator, and a freelance journalist. There's a reason why, on October 12, 2019, a bunch of plainclothes security personnel in unmarked vehicles beat Esraa Abdelfattah, forcibly dragged her into one of their cars, handcuffed

and repressed in the last nine months and why one even died.

On October 17, 2023, a GD was filed at Hatirjheel thana. "I will shoot you," he said. "You will pay for it," he said. Thanks to technology, Jihadul Hassan, the journalist, had recorded the whole conversation. There's again a reason why Jihadul Hassan, the talk show host, was threatened, assaulted, and stifled for giving less airtime to one of his guests, a musclem of a political party.

On September 24, 2023, a journalist answered his phone and all he heard was a menacing message from a member of the student wing of a political party: "Akhono shomoy aches bhalo hoye jan, noiley Nadim er moto mortey hobey." ("Change your ways while you still have time, otherwise you too will have to die like Nadim did.) The Nadim that he referred to was Golam Rabbani Nadim, a journalist who was beaten to death after reporting on the corruption of a local politician in June this year.

Also on September 24, Mosharraf Shah, a journalist and a fourth-year student of Chittagong University, was threatened, beaten severely, and warned against publishing negative

of the land, for spreading "negative and unobjective information," "demonstrating illegally," and "using violence to assault police and damage public properties." Today, in this shrunken courtroom of this world, Free Press is being hunted down and sent to oblivion. Impunity has been chosen as a key witness to nullify the existence of Free Press, and violence is being incentivised and prepared to deliver the master stroke of annihilation.

Every morning, I have the habit of watching YouTubers from all over presenting their side of the story. Some speak the truth with venom, some use slang to slay the images of powerful leaders. That is painful to watch. Some challenge and predict the fall of governments with imaginary dates and concocted data. That is dreadful to digest. In a sane world, none of this would have happened if only a little space for democratic tolerance could be carved out of the pockets of rulers. In the absence of a decent discourse on governance, and in the presence of fear lurking in the shadows, what else can we expect to read, watch, and listen to but total dissent pouring in through various media channels, defying borders, and kissing the skies of Free Press above.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Liner parts
- 6 Pre-1917 rulers
- 11 Moral system
- 12 Attacked
- 13 Like caramel
- 14 Suffering
- 15 Indian lutes
- 17 – amis
- 19 Wallop
- 20 Letter after upsilon
- 23 More pretentious
- 25 Persia, today
- 26 Fashion workers
- 28 Wander
- 29 "–Fideles"
- 30 Avenue tree
- 31 Tyler of "The Rings"

- 32 Match part
- 33 More pious
- 35 Coldly distant
- 38 Ice cream unit
- 41 Comic tribute
- 42 Eat away
- 43 Little darling
- 44 Ancient Mesopotamian region

- direction
- 8 Bustle
- 9 Galloped
- 10 Pig's place
- 16 Postal choice
- 17 Nino's mother
- 18 Flynn of film
- 20 Briefing spot
- 21 Writer Bret
- 22 Detail map
- 24 Belief, in brief
- 25 Presidential nickname
- 27 Counsels
- 31 Noble
- 33 Radiator attachment
- 34 Beige
- 35 Bow's shape
- 36 Singer Reed
- 37 Bran bit
- 39 Exalted work
- 40 For each

DOWN

- 1 Last mo.
- 2 Ordinal number ending
- 3 School board users
- 4 New Zealander
- 5 Wheat whackers
- 6 Presentation aid
- 7 Changes



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

P	I	C	A	S		F	O	N	D	
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