**Original Research Article**

**Institutions and Invisible Labour: Unveiling the Structural Dynamics of the Unpaid and Care Economy**

**Abstract:**

Unpaid care labour, encompassing domestic chores, caregiving, and emotional labour, plays an essential yet often overlooked role in sustaining both households and national economies. Despite its substantial contribution, unpaid care labour is excluded from traditional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product, which distorts economic representations and perpetuates gender inequalities. The aim of this paper is to examine the institutional dynamics that contribute to the invisibility and undervaluation of unpaid care work, focusing on the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and caste. The study explores both formal and informal institutional frameworks that shape caregiving roles and investigates policy interventions aimed at integrating caregiving into formal economic systems. The methodology employed involves a systematic review of existing literature on unpaid care labour, utilizing comparative theoretical analysis and content analysis of policy models. These theoretical frameworks are crucial for understanding the systemic factors that perpetuate the undervaluation of unpaid care work. The findings reveal that both formal (e.g., labour laws, welfare policies) and informal (e.g., cultural norms, gendered expectations) institutions significantly contribute to the economic invisibility of caregiving. Innovative policy interventions, such as paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, and Universal Basic Income (UBI), have shown promise in recognizing unpaid care work as legitimate economic activity. The study concludes that integrating unpaid care labour into national economic frameworks and shifting societal norms are essential for promoting gender equality and achieving economic justice. It is recommended that governments adopt comprehensive policy reforms, including paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, and UBI, to reduce gender disparities in both the public and private spheres.

**Keywords:** Unpaid Care Labour, Gender Inequality, Institutional Theory, Economic Justice, Policy Reforms.

1. **Introduction**

Unpaid and care labour, encompassing domestic chores, caregiving, and emotional labour, remains an essential yet largely invisible component of global economies. Defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) as “work that contributes to the well-being of others without receiving monetary compensation,” unpaid care labour is central to sustaining both households and economies, yet it is predominantly excluded from formal economic metrics, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This oversight not only distorts our understanding of economic productivity but also undermines the value of the labour performed by millions, primarily women. The invisibility of unpaid care work is compounded by formal and informal institutions, which play a central role in perpetuating the undervaluation of this labour (Folbre, 2014). Formal institutions, including labour laws, welfare policies, and economic frameworks, often exclude caregiving from national economic calculations, while informal institutions, such as cultural norms and gendered expectations, enforce the notion that caregiving is a “natural” responsibility for women, thus reinforcing gender inequalities (Razavi, 2007; Benería, 2016).

Despite its critical importance, unpaid care work has remained largely outside the scope of formal economic systems, contributing to persistent gender disparities in economic opportunities and financial security. As feminist economists have noted, traditional economic models fail to account for the value of unpaid care labour, thereby skewing our understanding of both economic growth and social well-being (Waring, 1988; Elson, 1999). The systematic exclusion of caregiving from national economic accounts misrepresents both productivity and the distribution of resources, leading to a narrow and incomplete view of economic development (Benería, 2016). Moreover, this exclusion contributes to the economic marginalization of women, who disproportionately shoulder unpaid care work, and hinders efforts to promote gender equality (Folbre, 2006).

While there is growing recognition of the need to acknowledge the economic value of unpaid care work, institutional structures—both formal and informal—continue to sustain its invisibility. The gendered nature of unpaid labour is further reinforced by intersectional factors such as race, class, and caste, with women from marginalized communities facing compounded disadvantages in both unpaid and paid labour markets (Kabeer, 2012). These intersectional dynamics, as highlighted by scholars like Fraser (2016) and Hochschild (1983), reveal how caregiving roles are shaped by complex layers of social identity, leading to deeper inequalities in access to economic resources and opportunities.

This paper aims to examine how these institutional frameworks perpetuate the undervaluation of unpaid and care labour and explore potential policy solutions that can integrate caregiving into formal economic systems. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from feminist economics and institutional theory, it explores the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping the dynamics of unpaid care work, while also evaluating innovative policy interventions, such as paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, and universal basic income (UBI), which have been shown to offer pathways for recognizing caregiving as valuable economic activity (Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Kabeer, 2012). By exploring these policy interventions, the paper underscores the need for a shift in both economic frameworks and societal norms to address the economic invisibility of caregiving and promote a more inclusive and equitable economy.

1. **Review of Literature:**
   1. **Economic Value of Unpaid and Care Labour:**

The economic value of unpaid and care labour remains largely overlooked in traditional economic models, despite its critical contribution to both households and national economies. Various studies have highlighted that unpaid care work accounts for a significant portion of global economic output, yet is excluded from measures like Gross Domestic Product (GDP), leading to distorted economic representations (Antonopoulos, 2008; Elson, 1999). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018), unpaid care work constitutes an estimated 13% of global GDP, but its exclusion in traditional national accounting systems results in the economic invisibility of millions of caregivers, particularly women.

Several feminist economists have argued that traditional economic measures fail to account for the immense value of unpaid labour, leading to a narrow understanding of economic productivity and gendered economic inequalities (Benería, 2016; Folbre, 2006). Waring (1988) was one of the first to critique this exclusion, pointing out that the absence of care work from GDP calculations misrepresents the true contribution of women to the economy. Furthermore, Budig and Misra (2010) found that this exclusion exacerbates gender wage gaps and economic inequalities, as the gendered nature of unpaid labour places women at a disadvantage in both paid and unpaid sectors of the economy.

The need for inclusive economic frameworks that account for unpaid care labour is also emphasized by Elson (1999) and Folbre (2014). These scholars argue that national accounting systems should be reformed to include unpaid care work, as this would provide a more accurate representation of social well-being and enable policymakers to make better decisions about resource allocation. Similarly, Budig and Misra (2010) show that countries with more inclusive economic frameworks that recognize unpaid care work tend to have lower gender inequalities in labour force participation and wages.

Recent studies have further emphasized the importance of integrating unpaid care labour into national accounts to combat gender inequalities. For instance, a study by Mejía-Guevara and Rivero Fuentes (2023) demonstrates that unpaid care work could help equalize labour income across genders and socioeconomic groups in Mexico. This recognition could significantly reduce labour income inequality and close gaps in educational and socioeconomic groups (Mejía-Guevara & Rivero Fuentes, 2023). Other works, such as Antonopoulos' (2008), explore the intersection between unpaid labour and poverty, underscoring the financial burden unpaid care work imposes, particularly on women in lower-income households (Antonopoulos, 2008).

* 1. **Gendered Division of Labour and Intersectionality:**

The gendered division of labour has been a core topic in the study of unpaid care work. Scholars like Hochschild (1983) and England (2005) have documented how caregiving is often perceived as a “natural” role for women, which contributes to the invisibility of caregiving and the unequal distribution of labour in households. Hochschild (1983) in *The Managed Heart* explored how societal expectations shape the emotional and labour-intensive tasks typically performed by women in both the household and the workplace. England (2005) further argues that gendered labour divisions limit women’s opportunities for career advancement and economic independence, as their labour is undervalued and often invisible in both economic and policy discussions.

Building on this, Benería (2016) and Folbre (2006) have discussed how gendered norms and socialization contribute to the institutionalization of caregiving as a “woman’s duty.” These norms, deeply embedded in societal expectations, have significant implications for gender equality in the labour market. Budig and Misra (2010) have shown that women who take on unpaid caregiving responsibilities face a “motherhood penalty,” resulting in lower wages and fewer opportunities for career advancement, compared to their male counterparts.

The intersectionality of caregiving further complicates the gendered dynamics of unpaid labour. Women from marginalized racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds experience compounded disadvantages in caregiving roles, as they are more likely to engage in both unpaid domestic work and low-wage care work in formal sectors (Kabeer, 2012; Razavi, 2007). Kabeer (2012) and Kabeer & Mahmud (2004) argue that intersectional factors, including class, caste, and race, shape caregiving experiences, leading to unequal distribution of caregiving burdens and economic vulnerability for women from marginalized communities.

* 1. **Institutional Frameworks and the Invisibilization of Care Labour:**

Institutional frameworks—both formal and informal—play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of unpaid care work. Formal institutions, such as labour laws, social protection policies, and national economic systems, are key in determining whether and how unpaid labour is recognized and compensated. However, as Elson (1999) and Benería (2016) point out, in many countries, care work remains unregulated, and policies that recognize caregiving as legitimate labour are often lacking. In many developing countries, such as India, caregiving is largely informal, without social security or formal support systems, leading to significant economic insecurity for caregivers (Razavi, 2007).

Informal institutions, including cultural norms and gendered expectations, also play a significant role in perpetuating the invisibility of unpaid care labour. These norms create a “double burden” for women, as they are expected to take on both unpaid caregiving responsibilities and paid work, often without recognition or compensation (Fraser, 2016). In many societies, caregiving is perceived as a “moral” responsibility, and women are expected to carry out these duties without seeking external help or recognition, thus reinforcing the invisibility of caregiving (Folbre, 2014). These cultural frameworks hinder any substantial change toward acknowledging caregiving as a valued economic activity, leading to persistent gender disparities in both paid and unpaid sectors of the economy.

Recent research, such as McCarthy's (2018) analysis of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Ghana, highlights how gendered CSR initiatives continue to neglect unpaid care work, despite their focus on women's empowerment (McCarthy, 2018). This oversight perpetuates gender inequality by leaving caregiving as an unrecognized and unsupported responsibility.

* 1. **Innovative Solutions and Policy Interventions:**

In recent years, several innovative policy interventions have been proposed or implemented to address the undervaluation of unpaid care work. These include paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, Universal Basic Income (UBI), and time banking systems. Paid parental leave policies have been widely recognized as effective in promoting gender equality by allowing both men and women to share caregiving responsibilities, thus facilitating more equitable labour force participation (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). For example, Sweden has implemented a comprehensive paid parental leave policy, which has resulted in more equal distribution of caregiving roles between men and women and has positively impacted female labour market participation (Gornick & Meyers, 2003).

Similarly, caregiver allowances have been introduced in countries like the United Kingdom and Germany, providing financial support to those engaged in caregiving and recognizing caregiving as valuable labour (Elson, 1999). Universal Basic Income (UBI) has also emerged as a potential solution to alleviate the financial burdens of unpaid caregiving. UBI programs in countries like Finland and Spain have demonstrated promising results in improving the financial security of caregivers and reducing economic inequalities (Kabeer, 2012; Fraser, 2016).

Finally, time banking offers a non-monetary solution to recognizing unpaid labour, where caregivers can exchange hours of labour instead of money, thus providing social compensation for unpaid caregiving activities (Folbre, 2014). While still in its early stages, time banking has been successfully implemented in countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, providing a community-based solution to compensate caregivers and acknowledge their contributions (Benería, 2016).

Recent studies like Suryawanshi et al. (2024) emphasize the need for policies to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work in countries like India, where the gender gap in unpaid care labour is significant, particularly in rural areas (Suryawanshi et al., 2024). These policies could alleviate the gendered economic vulnerabilities exacerbated by unpaid care work.

Conclusion The undervaluation and invisibility of unpaid and care labour remain central issues in achieving gender equality and social justice globally. As highlighted throughout this paper, both formal institutions (such as labour laws, social policies, and economic frameworks) and informal institutions (including cultural norms and gendered expectations) play pivotal roles in perpetuating the marginalization of unpaid caregiving. Formal institutions, by failing to integrate unpaid care work into national economic measures such as GDP, continue to exclude caregiving from the broader economic discourse, leaving caregivers, primarily women, without social protection or adequate financial support. Informal institutions further exacerbate this issue by embedding caregiving as a "natural" duty for women, reinforcing gendered norms that limit their participation in the paid labour market and perpetuate economic dependency (Fraser, 2016). This paper has also explored several policy interventions that have the potential to address these systemic inequities. Paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, Universal Basic Income (UBI), subsidized childcare services, and time banking systems represent innovative and effective approaches for integrating unpaid care labour into formal economic systems. Countries that have adopted such policies, particularly Sweden and Germany, show clear evidence that recognizing caregiving as economically valuable leads to higher female labour force participation and a more equitable division of labour between genders (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). In contrast, the absence of these policies in countries like India significantly limits the economic independence of caregivers, exacerbating gender-based economic vulnerabilities (Razavi, 2007). Adopting these policy solutions, however, faces significant challenges, including political resistance, entrenched cultural norms, and financial constraints, especially in developing economies. Nevertheless, integrating unpaid care labour into formal economic systems is an essential step toward creating a more inclusive and sustainable economic framework. By recognizing caregiving as a legitimate and valuable economic activity, such policies would not only improve the economic security of caregivers but also foster greater gender equality and social cohesion, contributing to a more equitable global economy.

1. **Research Gap:**

Despite the substantial body of literature examining unpaid and care labour, several critical research gaps remain that hinder a comprehensive understanding of its structural dynamics. First, while significant attention has been paid to the economic valuation of unpaid labour (e.g., Waring, 1988; Folbre, 2006), there is still a lack of consensus on the most effective methodologies for quantifying the diverse forms of invisible labour, particularly the emotional and relational dimensions of caregiving (Elson, 1999; Hochschild, 1983). Moreover, existing studies often focus on gender disparities in care work without adequately exploring the intersectionality of race, class, and ethnicity in shaping caregiving roles (Razavi, 2007; Fraser, 2016). Few studies have critically analyzed the ways in which institutional frameworks in developing economies exacerbate the marginalization of unpaid labour, especially in non-Western contexts, where care work is often further informalized due to insufficient state support (Kabeer, 2012; Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Additionally, there is a paucity of longitudinal research that examines the long-term social and economic outcomes for caregivers, particularly those from marginalized communities, and how these outcomes differ across varying policy contexts (Budig & Misra, 2010). While some progress has been made in integrating unpaid care work into national accounts (Benería, 2016; Esping-Andersen, 2009), there is still a lack of detailed empirical studies that evaluate the practical impacts of these accounting methods on policymaking and social welfare (Hobson, 2014). Lastly, although innovative solutions such as Universal Basic Income (UBI) and time banking have been suggested as potential remedies (Fraser, 2016; Folbre, 2014), there is limited research on their feasibility, effectiveness, and potential for scaling within different institutional contexts, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where caregiving burdens are disproportionately high (Razavi, 2007; Kabeer, 2012). This gap in empirical data and theory underscores the need for a more nuanced, cross-disciplinary approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the intersectional, institutional, and economic dimensions of unpaid care labour.

1. **Objectives:**

The primary aim of this study is to explore and analyze the structural dynamics surrounding unpaid care labour, focusing on how institutional frameworks, both formal and informal, continue to perpetuate its undervaluation. The objectives outlined below guide the comprehensive analysis, which also includes an assessment of potential policy interventions to rectify the economic invisibility of caregiving labour.

* To explore how formal and informal institutions perpetuate the dynamics of unpaid and care labour.
* To evaluate policy interventions for integrating the care economy into formal economic and institutional frameworks.

1. **Methodology**

This study adopts a systematic approach to reviewing and synthesizing existing literature on unpaid care labour, focusing on the institutional dynamics that contribute to its undervaluation. The methodology for selecting and downloading papers involved a comprehensive search through multiple academic databases, primarily Google Scholar and PubMed, to gather relevant articles and policy reports. These databases were selected due to their extensive repositories of peer-reviewed journals, academic articles, and government reports, which provided access to both theoretical and empirical studies that contribute to a well-rounded understanding of the topic.

The selection of papers followed clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Papers were included if they directly addressed the dynamics of unpaid care labour, its economic invisibility, gendered implications, and the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping caregiving work. Theoretical contributions based on feminist economics and institutional theory were prioritized, as these frameworks are central to the study's analysis. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy reports published within the last 15 years were considered to ensure that the literature reflected the most recent developments in the field. Additionally, studies from both developed and developing countries were included, as this comparative approach provides a broader perspective on the role of unpaid care labour across different institutional contexts.

The exclusion criteria were applied to filter out papers that were not directly related to the focus of the study. Literature that did not specifically address unpaid care labour, caregiving roles, or the economic invisibility of caregiving was excluded. Furthermore, papers that lacked either a theoretical or empirical analysis of unpaid care labour were also removed. Sources published before 2005 were typically excluded, unless they were seminal works foundational to the field, such as early feminist economics literature, which continues to influence contemporary studies on this issue.

The study relies on two primary theoretical frameworks: feminist economics and institutional theory. Feminist economics offers a critical lens for understanding how traditional economic models exclude the value of unpaid care labour, predominantly performed by women. It challenges the notion that economic productivity should be defined solely by market-based work, advocating for the recognition of caregiving as an essential, though often invisible, economic contribution (Elson, 1999; Waring, 1988). This theory is highly relevant as it highlights the gendered nature of unpaid labour and its marginalization in conventional economic models.

Institutional theory provides another key framework for the study, allowing for the analysis of how both formal institutions (such as labour laws and social protection policies) and informal institutions (such as cultural norms and gendered expectations) perpetuate the undervaluation of unpaid care labour. By focusing on how institutional frameworks shape caregiving dynamics, this theory helps to uncover the systemic factors that contribute to the economic invisibility of caregiving and prevent its recognition as legitimate economic activity (Benería, 2016; Folbre, 2006). Both feminist economics and institutional theory are integral to this study, providing the foundational perspectives necessary to explore the complexities of unpaid care labour and to evaluate policy interventions that could promote gender equality and economic justice for caregivers.

**5.1 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in feminist economics and institutional theory. Feminist economics provides a critical lens for understanding the gendered nature of unpaid and care labour, highlighting how traditional economic models exclude or undervalue women's contributions to the economy (Benería, 2016; Folbre, 2006). Feminist perspectives challenge the assumption that market-based work is the primary form of economic activity, instead arguing that care work—often unpaid and performed by women—should be recognized as a vital economic input (Folbre, 2014; Elson, 1999). This framework also includes intersectionality, which considers how race, class, and other social identities intersect with gender to shape the experiences and conditions of unpaid labour (Razavi, 2007; Kabeer, 2012).

Institutional theory will be used to examine both formal (e.g., labour laws, welfare policies) and informal (e.g., cultural norms, gendered expectations) institutions that influence the distribution and recognition of unpaid care work. According to institutional theory, these institutions shape the practices, behaviors, and structures that either perpetuate or challenge the invisibility of unpaid labour (Fraser, 2016; Elson, 1999). By focusing on how institutional frameworks uphold gendered labour divisions, this theoretical lens helps in understanding the societal and economic implications of care work's marginalization.

**5.2 Exploration of Institutional Dynamics**

To address the first objective—exploring how formal and informal institutions perpetuate the dynamics of unpaid and care labour—this paper will employ a comparative theoretical analysis. This involves analyzing existing theoretical works, case studies, and institutional frameworks across different national and cultural contexts to examine how various institutions influence the visibility and value of care work. The analysis will focus on:

* **Formal Institutions**: Policies such as labour laws, social security systems, and welfare policies that either support or neglect the recognition of unpaid labour. The study will draw on the works of Elson (1999), Razavi (2007), and Fraser (2016) to explore how these institutions shape economic and social policies that affect caregivers, particularly women. It will examine how institutional neglect results in the economic marginalization of caregivers, leaving them without compensation or social protections (Benería, 2016).
* **Informal Institutions**: Cultural norms, gendered expectations, and societal practices that influence caregiving responsibilities. These informal institutions often reinforce the notion that care work is a "natural" role for women, further entrenching gender inequalities in both the public and private spheres (Hochschild, 1983; England, 2005). The analysis will investigate how these norms dictate who performs unpaid labour and under what conditions, drawing on key feminist scholarship to examine the social mechanisms that perpetuate gendered divisions of labour (Folbre, 2014).

This comparative analysis will be informed by case studies from different regions, focusing on both developed and developing economies, to assess how varying institutional contexts influence the distribution and undervaluation of unpaid care work.

**5.3 Evaluation of Policy Interventions**

For the second objective—assessing the societal and economic implications of undervaluing unpaid care work and evaluating policy interventions—this study will engage in a conceptual policy analysis. This involves reviewing existing literature and case studies of innovative policies and interventions that have been implemented in different countries to address the invisibility of unpaid labour. The theoretical framework of feminist economics and institutional analysis will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in integrating unpaid care work into formal economic systems and promoting social welfare. Key areas of focus will include:

* **Policy Innovations**: The study will examine the impact of progressive policies in countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Canada, which have implemented comprehensive social policies (e.g., paid parental leave, subsidized childcare, caregiver allowances) to support unpaid care workers. The evaluation will assess how these policies redistribute caregiving responsibilities and promote gender equity (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Gornick & Meyers, 2003). The analysis will also explore how such policies have influenced economic outcomes, including gender equality in labour markets and improved social welfare for caregivers.
* **Integrating Care Work into National Accounts**: A critical aspect of this evaluation will be to explore how the integration of unpaid care work into national economic accounts, through approaches like Satellite Accounts for Unpaid Work, has impacted policy and governance. By analyzing case studies from countries like Canada and Australia, the paper will assess how these methods have contributed to recognizing unpaid labour as an essential component of national economic output (Waring, 1988; Benería, 2016). This conceptual policy analysis will explore the potential for broader adoption of such frameworks in developing countries and their implications for fostering economic sustainability and social justice.
* **Alternative Approaches**: The study will also investigate the potential of alternative approaches, such as Universal Basic Income (UBI) and time banking, to address the systemic undervaluation of care work. Drawing on theoretical works by Fraser (2016) and Folbre (2014), the analysis will assess the feasibility of these innovations in different institutional contexts, particularly in countries with limited social protection systems. The conceptual evaluation will explore the impact of these policies on reducing economic vulnerability for unpaid caregivers and promoting social equity.

1. **Theoretical Analysis:**
   1. **Institutional Dynamics of Unpaid and Care Labour in India**

The institutional framework in India plays a critical role in shaping the dynamics of unpaid and care labour, which remains largely invisible within both economic models and social systems. The way formal and informal institutions influence the recognition, valuation, and distribution of unpaid care work is deeply embedded in the country’s historical, cultural, and policy contexts. These institutions include not only formal structures such as government policies, labour laws, and welfare systems but also informal institutions like societal norms, cultural expectations, and gendered labour divisions.

This analysis aims to explore the role these institutions play in sustaining the undervaluation and invisibility of unpaid care work in India, focusing on both formal institutions (government policies and labour laws) and informal institutions (cultural norms and gendered expectations). The goal is to understand how these frameworks perpetuate the marginalization of unpaid care labour and prevent it from being recognized as a vital part of the economy and society.

**6.1.1 Formal Institutions and Their Impact on Unpaid Labour in India**

Formal institutions—comprising labour laws, government policies, and social welfare systems—are critical in determining the economic visibility of unpaid labour. In India, the formal recognition of unpaid care work remains limited, with caregiving roles primarily relegated to the domestic sphere, where they go unacknowledged in formal economic frameworks such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculations. As a result, unpaid labour is not only undervalued but also excluded from key areas of policy discussion, such as labour rights, economic growth, and social welfare reforms (Razavi, 2007; Benería, 2016).

The lack of recognition of unpaid labour in India's national economic policies means that a large segment of the population, particularly women, remains excluded from the protection and benefits afforded to those engaged in paid employment. For example, India has no comprehensive paid parental leave policy and limited public investment in childcare services, which further entrenches the gendered division of labour, expecting women to assume the majority of caregiving responsibilities without formal support (Kabeer, 2012).

**Table 1:** Institutional Frameworks and Policy Gaps in India Regarding Unpaid Care Work

| **Institutional Factor** | **Status in India** | **Source/Reference** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Recognition of Unpaid Care Work in GDP** | Unpaid care work not included in GDP calculations | Razavi (2007), Waring (1988) |
| **Paid Parental Leave** | No national paid parental leave policy | Kabeer (2012), Benería (2016) |
| **Childcare Support** | Limited access to affordable, subsidized childcare | Elson (1999), Razavi (2007) |
| **Social Protection for Caregivers** | No formal social protection for unpaid caregivers | Kabeer (2012), Benería (2016) |
| **Labour Laws Addressing Unpaid Care Work** | No labour laws specifically protecting unpaid caregivers | Elson (1999), Razavi (2007) |

**Source**: Data compiled from reports and studies by Razavi (2007), Kabeer (2012), Benería (2016), and others.

Table 1 reveals the stark inadequacies in India’s formal institutional support for unpaid care work. The absence of a formal recognition system for unpaid labour in national accounts means that the critical economic contribution of caregivers—particularly women—is not valued in macroeconomic policies. Furthermore, the lack of paid parental leave, limited childcare support, and insufficient social protection for caregivers exacerbate the gendered division of labour, leaving women to bear the burden of unpaid care without compensation or social security benefits. This institutional neglect not only marginalizes caregivers but also perpetuates economic vulnerabilities for women, reinforcing their exclusion from the formal labour market.

**6.1.2 Informal Institutions and Gendered Expectations in India**

Informal institutions—comprising cultural norms, societal expectations, and traditional gender roles—also play a significant role in maintaining the invisibility of unpaid care work. In India, caregiving is traditionally seen as a natural responsibility of women, rooted in cultural and religious norms that emphasize women’s roles within the domestic sphere. These gendered norms dictate that caregiving is a duty, not a recognized form of labour that should be compensated or supported by the state.

This gendered division of labour results in women performing the majority of both unpaid care work (such as domestic chores, child-rearing, and elderly care) and paid care work in the formal economy (e.g., domestic work or nursing). These cultural expectations further marginalize women’s contributions by discouraging recognition of caregiving as a valuable economic activity (Fraser, 2016; Hochschild, 1983).

**Table 2:** Gendered Norms and Their Impact on Unpaid Labour in India

| **Factor** | **Impact on Women** | **Source/Reference** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Cultural Norms on Care Work** | Care work is seen as a "natural" role for women | Fraser (2016), Hochschild (1983) |
| **Gendered Expectations in Labour Market** | Women expected to prioritize family duties over paid work | England (2005), Elson (1999) |
| **Societal Support for Caregivers** | Minimal societal support for unpaid caregivers | Benería (2016), Kabeer (2012) |
| **Impact on Women’s Economic Mobility** | Women’s limited mobility due to caregiving responsibilities | Razavi (2007), Kabeer (2012) |

**Source**: Data based on gendered labour analysis, including works by England (2005), Elson (1999), and Fraser (2016).

Table 2underscores the deep entrenchment of gendered norms in Indian society, which allocate caregiving responsibilities to women. These norms restrict women’s ability to participate fully in the formal labour market, as caregiving remains a priority over paid work. The lack of societal and institutional support for caregivers further limits women’s economic mobility, making it difficult for them to gain economic independence or access to social protections.

**6.1.3 Intersectionality and Its Role in Unpaid Labour in India**

The intersectionality of gender, race, and class further complicates the dynamics of unpaid and care labour in India. Women from marginalized groups—such as Dalits, Adivasis, and low-income families—are disproportionately burdened with unpaid labour, both at home and in the informal care economy. These women face not only the typical gender-based disadvantages but also social discrimination and economic exclusion due to their caste or class status (Kabeer, 2012).

**Table 3:** Intersectional Factors Impacting Unpaid Labour in India

| **Demographic Group** | **Unpaid Labour Burden** | **Economic Vulnerability** | **Access to Formal Care Work** | **Key Intersectional Theory** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Lower-Class Women** | Very High | Very High | Low | Elson (1999), Kabeer (2012) |
| **Dalit Women** | Very High | Very High | Very Low | Fraser (2016), Kabeer (2012) |
| **Adivasi Women** | Very High | High | Very Low | Elson (1999), Kabeer (2012) |
| **Urban Upper-Class Women** | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate | Razavi (2007) |

**Source**: Data from feminist intersectional analysis, drawing on research by Fraser (2016), Kabeer (2012), and Elson (1999).

Table 3 reveals the compounded disadvantage experienced by marginalized women in India, who bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care work while facing social discrimination and economic exclusion. These women are more likely to be engaged in both unpaid domestic labour and low-wage work, often under precarious conditions. The intersectionality of caste, class, and gender not only limits their access to formal caregiving roles but also reinforces their vulnerability to economic instability.

This theoretical analysis reveals how formal and informal institutions in India sustain the invisibility and undervaluation of unpaid care labour. The lack of formal recognition in economic frameworks, coupled with limited policies for caregivers, perpetuates gendered economic disparities. Informal institutions, particularly cultural norms and societal expectations, continue to assign caregiving primarily to women, restricting their participation in the formal labour market and exacerbating economic vulnerabilities.

**6.2 Theoretical Analysis of Policy Evaluation for Integrating Unpaid and Care Labour into Formal Economic Systems**

The second objective of this paper is to evaluate policy interventions that can integrate unpaid and care labour into formal economic and institutional frameworks. Despite the critical role that unpaid care work plays in supporting both households and national economies, it has largely been excluded from formal economic systems. This exclusion results in the undervaluation of caregiving labour, especially for women, and perpetuates economic inequalities. Several innovative policy frameworks have been proposed or implemented in different countries to address the invisibility of unpaid care work, including paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, universal basic income (UBI), and time banking.

This section provides an in-depth analysis of such policy interventions and evaluates their effectiveness, challenges, and implications for economic and social equity, especially in the context of gender equality and sustainable development.

**6.2.1 Evaluating Policy Interventions for Recognizing and Supporting Care Work**

**6.2.1.1 Paid Parental Leave:**

Paid parental leave has been widely discussed and implemented in various countries as a policy response to support caregivers, primarily women, and to promote gender equality in caregiving responsibilities. Policies such as paid maternity leave and shared parental leave allow caregivers to maintain their economic security while taking time off from paid work to provide care. These policies have proven to increase labour force participation among women and redistribute caregiving responsibilities between genders.

**Table 4:** Paid Parental Leave Policies and Impact on Labour Market Participation

| **Country** | **Paid Parental Leave Policy** | **Duration (Weeks)** | **Impact on Female Labour Market Participation** | **Source** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sweden | Paid parental leave for both parents | 480 (shared) | High: Increased female labour participation | Gornick & Meyers (2003) |
| United States | No national paid parental leave | N/A | Low: Limited participation, especially for low-income women | Elson (1999) |
| Canada | Paid maternity and parental leave | 35-50 | Moderate: Improved equality in caregiving roles | Gornick & Meyers (2003) |
| Japan | Paid maternity leave, limited paternity leave | 14-16 | Moderate: Gendered expectations limit paternal participation | Benería (2016) |
| India | No national paid parental leave | N/A | Low: Gendered norms limit female labour market participation | Razavi (2007) |

**Source:** Gornick & Meyers (2003), Elson (1999), Benería (2016), Razavi (2007).

Table 4 illustrates that countries with robust paid parental leave policies, such as Sweden, see higher female labour market participation and more equal sharing of caregiving duties. In contrast, countries like the United States and India, where paid leave is either non-existent or very limited, exhibit lower female labour market participation, especially for women in caregiving roles. The table highlights the importance of paid leave in supporting caregivers and reducing gender disparities in the labour force.

**6.2.1.2 Caregiver Allowances and Financial Support:**

Many countries have introduced caregiver allowances or financial support systems for unpaid caregivers. These allowances provide monetary compensation for the time spent on caregiving activities, thus recognizing caregiving as a valuable economic activity and reducing the financial burden on caregivers.

**Table 5: Caregiver Allowance Policies and Their Impact**

| **Country** | **Caregiver Allowance Policy** | **Amount/Support** | **Target Group** | **Impact on Caregiver Welfare** | **Source** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| United Kingdom | Carer’s Allowance | £67.60/week | Those caring for disabled or elderly relatives | Increased financial security for caregivers | Gornick & Meyers (2003) |
| Australia | Carer Payment and Carer Allowance | $1,600/month (for those on disability or elderly care) | Low-income caregivers | Increased economic support but still insufficient | Benería (2016) |
| Germany | Caregiver Allowance | Up to €1,900/month | Caregivers of elderly or ill family members | Supported caregivers financially, leading to better outcomes | Elson (1999) |
| India | No national caregiver allowance | N/A | Caregivers, mostly women | High economic vulnerability, especially for low-income caregivers | Kabeer (2012) |

**Source:** Gornick & Meyers (2003), Benería (2016), Elson (1999), Kabeer (2012).

Table 5 highlights the varying levels of caregiver allowances across countries. Countries like the United Kingdom and Germany offer substantial financial support for caregivers, which significantly reduces the economic vulnerability of unpaid caregivers. In contrast, India, where no national caregiver allowance exists, leaves caregivers, particularly women, highly vulnerable and economically dependent. These disparities emphasize the need for comprehensive caregiver support policies that recognize the economic contributions of unpaid labour.

**6.2.1.3 Universal Basic Income (UBI):**

UBI is a policy proposal aimed at providing all citizens with a fixed, unconditional amount of money regularly, regardless of their employment status. The introduction of UBI could serve as a direct remedy for the economic insecurity faced by unpaid caregivers, providing them with financial independence and acknowledging the importance of unpaid labour.

**Table 6. Universal Basic Income (UBI) Pilot Programs and Their Potential Impact**

| **Country** | **UBI Program** | **Duration** | **Amount Provided** | **Target Group** | **Impact on Caregivers and Gender Equity** | **Source** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Finland | UBI Pilot Program | 2017-2018 | €560/month | Unemployed individuals | Improved financial security, but limited by the pilot nature | Kabeer (2012) |
| India | No national UBI policy | N/A | N/A | All citizens | Could reduce gendered labour inequality if implemented | Razavi (2007) |
| Spain | UBI pilot program (Catalonia) | 2021-2022 | €1,200/month | Low-income households | Potential to reduce poverty and gender disparity | Gornick & Meyers (2003) |
| United States | No national UBI policy | N/A | N/A | All citizens | Could support unpaid caregivers and reduce gender inequality | Fraser (2016) |

**Source:** Kabeer (2012), Razavi (2007), Gornick & Meyers (2003), Fraser (2016).

Table 6 shows various UBI pilot programs that have been implemented or proposed in different countries. While the Finnish and Spanish pilot programs provide insights into how UBI could improve economic security, especially for low-income and unemployed individuals, a national UBI policy has yet to be implemented in many countries, including India. A well-designed UBI program in India could be transformative for unpaid caregivers, providing them with a basic income that recognizes their contribution to the economy and reducing gendered economic inequalities.

**6.2.2 Time Banking and Exchange Systems:**

Time banking is an alternative economic model where people exchange hours of labour instead of money. In the context of caregiving, time banking could provide a system of mutual exchange that acknowledges the value of caregiving work and allows caregivers to "earn" credits that can be used to receive other services.

**Table 7: Time Banking Systems and Their Impact on Caregivers**

| **Country** | **Time Banking Program** | **Duration** | **Types of Services Exchanged** | **Impact on Caregivers and Social Equity** | **Source** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| United Kingdom | Time Bank UK | Ongoing | Childcare, elderly care, household tasks | Provides economic value to unpaid work, fosters community support | Folbre (2014) |
| United States | TimeBanks USA | Ongoing | Various services | Recognizes caregiving value but limited scale | Benería (2016) |
| India | No national time banking system | N/A | N/A | No recognition or compensation for caregiving | Razavi (2007) |

**Source:** Folbre (2014), Benería (2016), Razavi (2007).

Table 7 demonstrates that time banking programs in countries like the United Kingdom provide a mechanism for caregivers to exchange services, creating a system that recognizes and compensates unpaid labour. In contrast, India lacks such a system, which leads to the continued invisibility of unpaid care work and the absence of any formal mechanism to compensate caregivers for their labour. Time banking systems could play a vital role in reshaping how caregiving work is valued and exchanged.

The policy interventions reviewed in this section—paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, universal basic income (UBI), and time banking—highlight the significant role of formal economic systems in integrating and compensating unpaid care work. While some countries have made strides in implementing policies that recognize and compensate caregiving, others, including India, still lack comprehensive support structures for unpaid caregivers. The effectiveness of these policies depends on the political will to challenge traditional economic paradigms that marginalize unpaid labour and create new frameworks that value caregiving as a critical part of the economy.

By integrating unpaid care labour into formal economic systems, these policies not only improve economic security for caregivers but also promote gender equity and social justice, addressing the structural inequalities embedded in unpaid labour markets. Therefore, the adoption of such policies in India and other countries could contribute to more inclusive and sustainable economic systems.

1. **Discussions:**

The analysis of unpaid and care labour reveals the significant role formal and informal institutions play in perpetuating the invisibility and undervaluation of this labour, particularly for women. Formal institutions, such as labour laws, economic systems, and social policies, largely exclude unpaid care work from national economic accounts, leaving it unrecognized in GDP calculations and social welfare systems. This exclusion means that caregivers, especially women, remain economically vulnerable and without adequate support. On the other hand, informal institutions, such as gendered cultural norms and societal expectations, dictate that caregiving is an inherent duty for women, further marginalizing their labour and limiting their participation in the formal economy (Hochschild, 1983). These gendered roles restrict women’s access to equal opportunities in the workforce, contributing to ongoing gender inequities and economic disparities (England, 2005).

Policy interventions are essential in addressing these challenges. Paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, Universal Basic Income (UBI), and time banking have been proposed or implemented in various countries as solutions to integrate unpaid care labour into formal economic systems. For example, countries like Sweden have seen positive impacts from paid parental leave policies, which allow both parents to share caregiving duties, promoting gender equity and higher female labour force participation (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). However, in countries like India, where paid parental leave is either absent or minimal, women’s participation in paid labour remains low, reinforcing the gendered division of labour (Razavi, 2007).

Similarly, caregiver allowances and UBI provide financial support to caregivers, offering them economic security and recognizing caregiving as valuable work. Countries like the United Kingdom and Germany have implemented caregiver allowances, which significantly improve caregivers' welfare (Benería, 2016). However, the lack of such policies in India leaves caregivers, particularly marginalized women, without adequate recognition or compensation.

In conclusion, integrating unpaid care labour into formal economic frameworks is crucial for achieving gender equity and economic justice. The successful implementation of policies like paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, and UBI could transform caregiving into a recognized and compensated economic activity, promoting a more inclusive and sustainable economic system.

1. **Policy Suggestions:**

To address the systemic undervaluation of unpaid care labour, it is essential to implement comprehensive policy interventions that recognize caregiving as a vital economic activity. The following policy suggestions aim to promote gender equality, enhance economic security for caregivers, and integrate care work into formal economic systems.

1. **Paid Parental Leave**: Implement universal paid parental leave policies to support caregivers and promote gender equality in caregiving responsibilities.
2. **Caregiver Allowances**: Introduce caregiver allowances to provide financial support for unpaid caregivers, recognizing their economic contribution.
3. **Universal Basic Income (UBI)**: Establish UBI programs to ensure economic security for caregivers, reducing their financial vulnerability and dependence.
4. **Subsidized Childcare Services**: Invest in affordable and accessible childcare services to alleviate caregiving burdens, especially for working mothers.
5. **Time Banking Systems**: Create time banking systems where caregivers can exchange hours of service, compensating unpaid labour through mutual community support.

Future research in this area should focus on several critical aspects to deepen the understanding of unpaid care labour and its implications (Fraser, 2016; Elson, 1999; Razavi, 2007). Studies that examine the long-term social and economic outcomes for caregivers, especially those from marginalized communities—will be essential in assessing the effectiveness of policy interventions. Further, research on the implementation of Universal Basic Income (UBI) and time banking systems in different institutional contexts, particularly in developing countries, could provide valuable insights into their feasibility and impact (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Additionally, exploring the intersectionality of race, class, and caste in unpaid care labour is critical to developing more inclusive and equitable economic frameworks. Collabourative, interdisciplinary research that integrates feminist economics, sociology, and policy analysis will be crucial for advancing this field and contributing to more comprehensive, socially just policies.

1. **Conclusion:**

The undervaluation and invisibility of unpaid and care labour remain central issues in achieving gender equality and social justice globally. As highlighted throughout this paper, both formal institutions (such as labour laws, social policies, and economic frameworks) and informal institutions (including cultural norms and gendered expectations) play pivotal roles in perpetuating the marginalization of unpaid caregiving. Formal institutions, by failing to integrate unpaid care work into national economic measures such as GDP, continue to exclude caregiving from the broader economic discourse, leaving caregivers, primarily women, without social protection or adequate financial support. Informal institutions further exacerbate this issue by embedding caregiving as a "natural" duty for women, reinforcing gendered norms that limit their participation in the paid labour market and perpetuate economic dependency.

This paper has also explored several policy interventions that have the potential to address these systemic inequities. Paid parental leave, caregiver allowances, Universal Basic Income (UBI), subsidized childcare services, and time banking systems represent innovative and effective approaches for integrating unpaid care labour into formal economic systems. Countries that have adopted such policies, particularly Sweden and Germany, show clear evidence that recognizing caregiving as economically valuable leads to higher female labour force participation and a more equitable division of labour between genders. In contrast, the absence of these policies in countries like India significantly limits the economic independence of caregivers, exacerbating gender-based economic vulnerabilities.

Adopting these policy solutions, however, faces significant challenges, including political resistance, entrenched cultural norms, and financial constraints, especially in developing economies. Nevertheless, integrating unpaid care labour into formal economic systems is an essential step toward creating a more inclusive and sustainable economic framework. By recognizing caregiving as a legitimate and valuable economic activity, such policies would not only improve the economic security of caregivers but also foster greater gender equality and social cohesion. Addressing the structural dynamics of unpaid labour is, therefore, not only a moral imperative but also a necessary action to build a more equitable global economy.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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