

The Care Economy in Rural Context: A Gendered Perspective

Abstract

Domestic care work has historically been ignored and not calculated in national or international statistics. The study intended to investigate the time spent by both men and women on domestic care activities and calculate the economic value of these activities. The sample size included 495 participants (248 females and 247 males) from rural Chakwal using a purposive sampling technique. The results revealed significant gender differences in the time spent on domestic care activities, with females spending 87,060 hours on all domestic care activities, such as children, elderly, domestic care, and people with special needs. Meanwhile, males spend only 25,795 hours on domestic care activities monthly. The economic value calculated for care activities for females is 13.4 million rupees, and for men is 4 million rupees in a month. The study emphasizes promoting shared family domestic care responsibilities and increasing societal recognition of the importance of caregiving activities.
Keywords: Domestic Care, Economic Value, Gender Analysis, Unpaid Care Work

INTRODUCTION

Domestic care encompasses all everyday activities conducted mainly inside the home, including unpaid domestic tasks such as house cleaning and grocery shopping and caregiving for individuals like newborns and the elderly. The care economy encompasses paid and unpaid labor and services that facilitate caring in its many manifestations. Care labor includes direct tasks like feeding an infant or tending to a sick individual and indirect tasks such as cooking and cleaning (WEF, 2022). Beyeler (2019) mentions that these caregiving activities enhance the health and efficacy of people and communities. Despite its essential function, domestic caregiving has historically been neglected, marginalized, and unrecognized in family, community, and national economies, perpetuating conventional gender stereotypes despite its significant value (UN Women, 2016). Moreover, though care is an important resource for society, the major responsibility of delivering care labor increasingly rests on families, and within families, on females. These gender disparities are central to the controversy around domestic care obligations, where women and girls are the predominant responsibility for these caregiving tasks (UN Women, 2020). According to the International Labor Organization (2018), women dedicate many more hours per week to unpaid care work than men, regardless of demographic or cultural conditions. Compared to 30% of men with children, about 91% of women spend at least an hour daily on housework (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023). The unequal distribution of labor results from deeply ingrained cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender roles, which place men in subservient roles within the home sphere and define women as the primary caregivers and housewives (Kolovich et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2016). This inequality in gender roles endures and is

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firmly rooted in historical, cultural, and structural elements that impact society's expectations and conventions around gender roles, even in the face of societal developments and the progressive development of gender norms (UN Women, 2016). Gender-based labor divisions have existed for generations, with women being allocated caregiving and domestic activities and men being expected to provide for and defend others (Zhu & Chang, 2019). The conventional concepts of femininity and masculinity that assign women to submissive positions within the domestic realm and give men dominant positions in every decision-making activity were reinforced by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and legislative frameworks (Huberman, 2023; Dietrich et al., 2021). Limiting women to household chores was not just a result of cultural expectations; it is also reflected in broader economic and power relations. Moreover, the prevailing societal perspectives regarding masculinity and femininity additionally function to uphold conventional gender roles, thereby sustaining the belief that providing care is intrinsically feminine and, consequently, of lower social significance (Sharma et al., 2016).

Furthermore, there are no clear boundaries defining women's care labor, and neither national nor international indices recognize the contributions made by women in this role. Nor are women considered workers in the economy (ILO, 2018). Caregiving labor is frequently undervalued from an economic standpoint in terms of financial pay and recognition. Compared to jobs in industries with a predominance of men, caregiving responsibilities are often undervalued in most nations (Oxfam, 2020). The marginalization of women's labor and gender inequality in the workforce have been sustained by the absence of acknowledgment and discussion of domestic care work in economic discourse (Schulz & Eden, 2016). Thus, in addition to perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization, this reinforces already-existing gender disparities in terms of pay, access to resources, and employment prospects (UN Women, 2018).

As women make up most caregivers, the lack of financial recompense for these responsibilities undermines their social standing and economic autonomy (Shohel et al., 2021). Thus, for their financial security, they might have to rely on others, usually male wage earners (Balabanova, 2007). Even with recent advancements in the campaigns to advance gender equality and question conventional gender norms, women are still disproportionately burdened by domestic work (Shao & Lee, 2023; Smith & Sinkford, 2022). While there has been some success in closing the gender gap in domestic care allocation, there are still significant discrepancies, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and policy interventions (Beach et al., 2022; Smith & Sinkford, 2022). Despite these global pledges and further endeavors, the actual execution is still restricted and unexplored. Only the government statistical agencies in the United States and the United Kingdom have partially integrated the periodic and systematic measurements of the amount of time spent on unpaid work at the national level into their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and have taken these measurements seriously. Despite efforts to quantify and evaluate unpaid care work across national borders, an increasing amount of scholarly literature has done so (Dorji et al., 2020). Addressing the root causes of gender inequality in domestic care allocation and building a more inclusive and equitable society can be aided by programs like equal parental leave laws, reasonably priced childcare options, and campaigns to dispel gender stereotypes (Beach et al., 2022; Meulenbroeks et al., 2021).

Problem Statement

Keeping the above situation in front, understand Pakistani men and women in rural settings, it is crucial to investigate how much time men and women spend on domestic care activities in rural areas and how to calculate the economic value of domestic care activities against time spent by men and women in rural settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative survey research design to explore the gender differences in the time spent by both men and women in the household and gender differences in the market-based economic values for these activities. The population of the study comprised the rural area of Chackwal, where Balkassar was chosen as the targeted area for this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to employ a total of 495 participants, where 247 males and 248 females of the age range 18-60 from all the marital groups took part in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data was collected using a survey tool developed by Tabassum et al., (2023) in their recent study on 'Measuring Women's Contribution in Care Economy: Constructing Survey Based Indexed Questionnaire. Domestic care has 20 items encompassing different domestic care activities like cleaning the house, preparing food & serving meals/guests, washing & ironing clothes, shopping, collecting household supplies, livestock care & payments of household bills. The collected data was entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). For the demographics part, descriptive analysis was done. At the same time, for the contribution of both men and women to the care economy, the average time was calculated to reveal the gender differences in the time spent on domestic care activities. It used a formula to calculate economic value against time spent on domestic care activities.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the whole study, ethical issues were of utmost importance. The participants gave informed consent before data collection, guaranteeing their voluntary participation, and they were well-informed about the study's goal. Their responses were anonymized to preserve their privacy, and the participants' identities were kept secret. The information was securely saved, and only researchers with permission may access it. The researchers ensured their prejudices and assumptions did not affect the procedure used to collect or analyze the data.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This part of the study shows significant results: descriptive demographic statistics, gender differences in the time spent on domestic care activities, and gender differences in the market-based economic value. These variations between genders in terms of the amount of time spent on domestic activities demonstrate the contribution that both men and women make to the care economy.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics of Demographics of the Participants

Variables	Obs.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	495	18-28	183	37.3
		29-38	144	29
		39-48	85	17
		49-60	83	16.8
Gender	495	Male	247	49.9
		Female	248	50.1
Education	495	Matric and below	314	63.4
		Matric above	181	36.6
Marital Status	495	Never married	143	28.9
		Married	328	66.3
		Divorced	4	.8
		Widowed	20	4.0
Employment Status	495	Employed	109	22.0
		Not working	249	50.3
		Self-employed	137	27.7
Monthly Income	495	32 thousand and below	196	39.6
		32 thousand above	299	60.4
Family System	495	Nuclear	193	39.0
		Joint	302	61.0
Type of household earners	495	Dual earner	72	14.5
		Single male earner	407	82.2
		Single female earner	16	3.2
Feeling while doing these activities	495	Fresh	39	7.9
		Better	139	28.1
		Fine	82	16.6
		Fatigued	120	24.2
		Drained	115	23.2

Table 1 depicts the participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, education, marital status, employment status, monthly income, family system, types of household earners, and overall feelings of participants about performing domestic care work. Participants' gender distribution reveals that 50.1% are women and 49.9% are men. The age distribution has four categories. The largest age group was 18–28, accounting for 37.3%. The second largest group was 29–38-year-olds (29%). The sample included 17% of participants aged 39–48, while 16.8% were aged 49–60. Most of the participants, i.e., 66.6%, are married. Next in line are those who have never married and those who are widowed (28.9% and 4.0%, respectively), with the lowest percentage, i.e., just 0.8% being divorced. Among education, 63.4% of participants had only completed Matriculation, indicating a high percentage of low-educated people. In contrast, 36.6% of participants had finished schooling above the

Matriculation level, showing a lower percentage of those with higher education. According to the participant's employment status, 22% are employed, 50.3% are unemployed, and 27.7% work for themselves. Sixty-one percent of the participants belonged to joint family systems, while 39 percent were in nuclear family systems. Monthly income distribution shows two main groups in the group. 39.6%, a tiny number, reported a monthly income of 32,000 PKR or less, while 60.4% reported a monthly income of 32,000 or more. This income distribution shows the sample's economic profile, with more individuals in the top income bracket than in the prior group. Regarding the household earner, 82.2% of the participants belonged to the single male earner category, while the remaining 14.5% and 3.2% belonged to the dual-earning and single female earner categories. When performing domestic care duties, most participants—28.1%—feel better, followed by those who are exhausted and drained—24.2% and 23.2%. Only 7.9% of the individuals felt fresh when completing domestic care tasks, compared to 16.6% who said they were fine.

Figure 1:
Gender Difference in Mean Time Spent on Domestic Care Activities

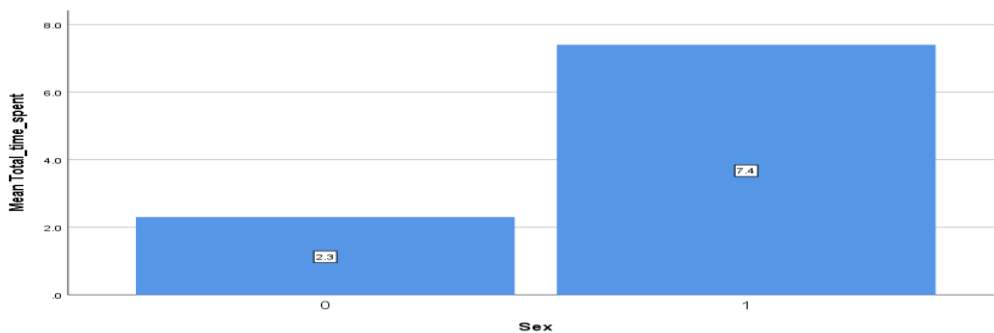


Figure 1 shows the gender difference in the meantime spent on domestic care activities, on average. The average time women spent providing domestic care was 7.4 hours per day. On average, men dedicated 2.3 hours out of 24 hours to household care tasks. It is important to note that women engaged in home caregiving tasks for nearly three times as long as men.

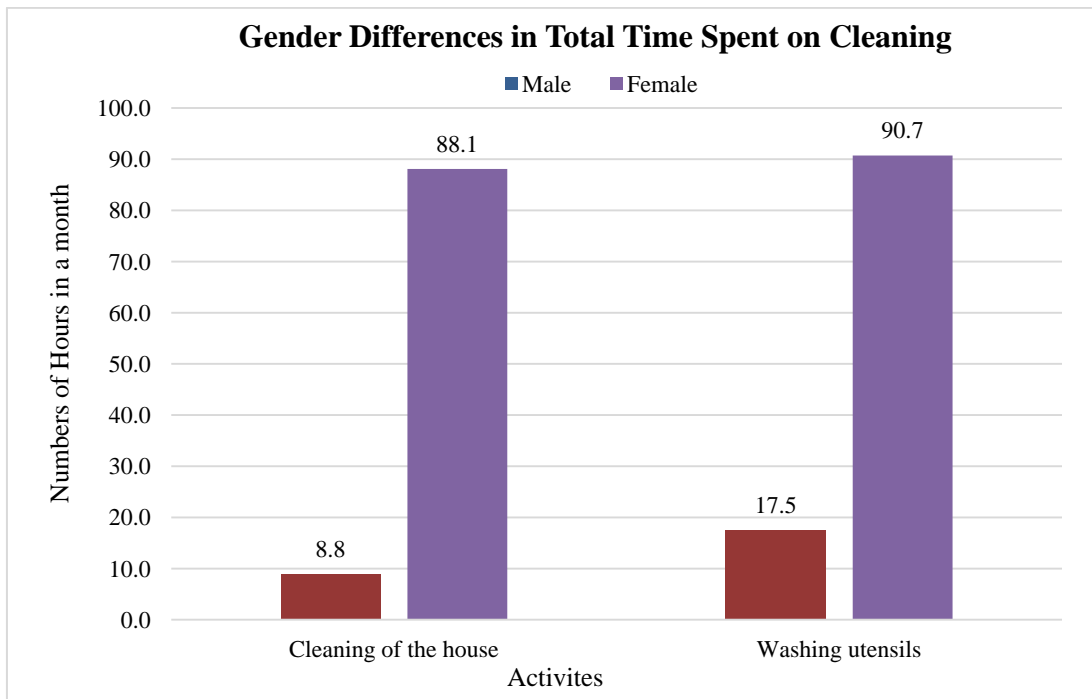
Figure 2:*Gender Differences in Time Spent on Cleaning Activities in Domestic Care Dimension*

Figure 2 shows the gender differences in the average time spent cleaning the house under domestic care in one month. In comparison to men, who devote very little time to these activities—spending an average of only 17.5 and 8.8 hours per month on cleaning of house activities and utensil washing, respectively—females are more likely to devote 90.7 and 88.1 hours per month to these tasks, indicating a greater amount of time spent on domestic care tasks.

Figure 3:

Gender Differences in the Average Time Spent on Preparing Food and Serving Meals/Guests in Domestic Care Dimension

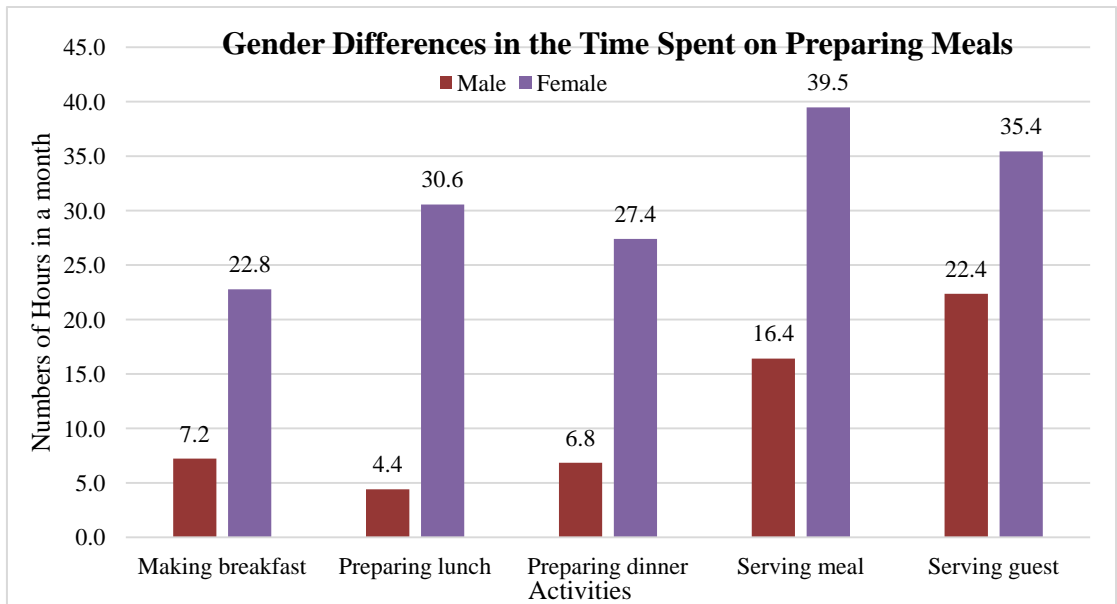


Figure 3 shows gender differences in the time spent on activities related to preparing and serving food to families in the domestic care dimension. Regarding meal preparation and serving, the figure unequivocally demonstrates that women devote more time to these tasks each month than men. Most of the time is spent by women making breakfast, lunch, and dinner (with an average of 30.6, 24.9, and 22.8 hours per month), respectively. Conversely, men spend an average of 4.4, 6.8, and 7.2 hours a month preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner, respectively, indicating that in Pakistani households, these tasks are exclusively assigned to women. In a month, the time spent serving meals to families for males and females is 16.4 and 39.5 hours, respectively. Males spend 22.4 hours, and ladies spend 35.4 hours serving guests each month, significantly higher than preparing food for families.

Figure 4:

Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on Washing, Ironing, and Mending of Clothes in Domestic Care Dimension

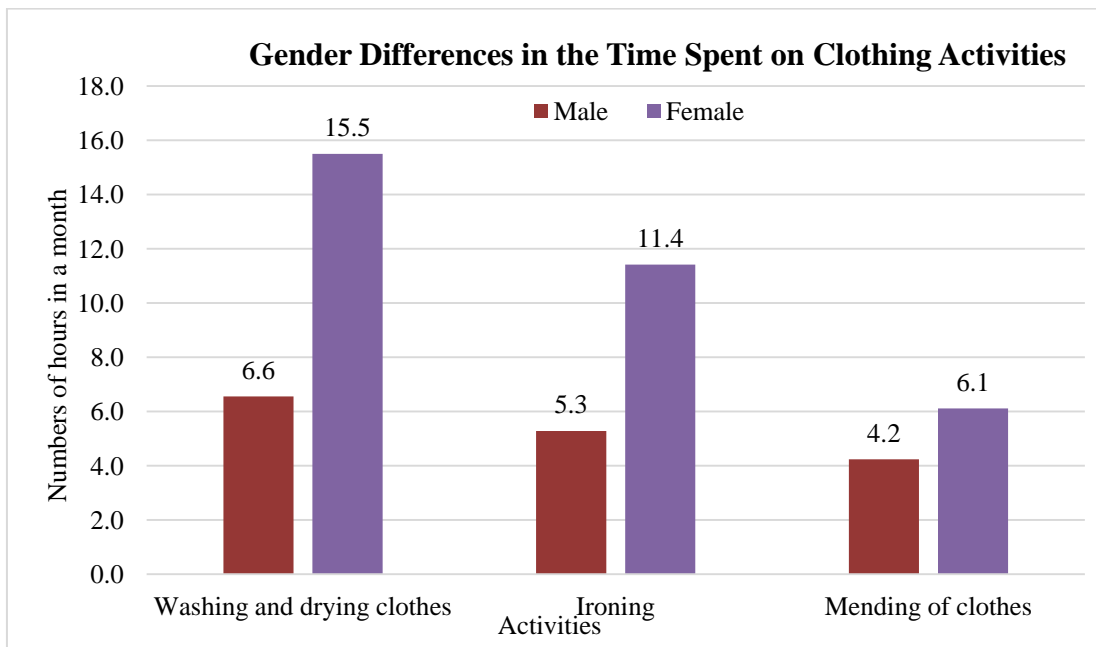


Figure 4 shows the gender differences in the time spent washing, ironing, and mending clothes over a month. In comparison to men, women devote more time to each activity: 15.5, 11.4, and 6.1 hours per month to clothing washing, drying, and mending. Conversely, men devote less time, which is 6.6, 5.3, and 4.2 hours each month, to these activities.

Figure 5:
Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on Shopping for Domestic Care Dimension

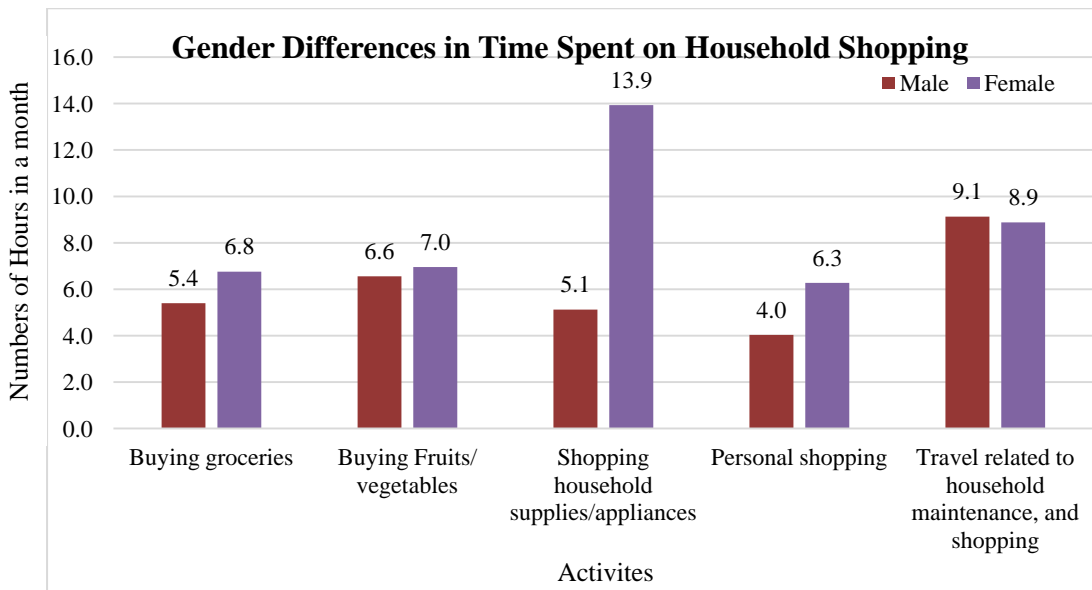


Figure 5 shows the gender differences in the time spent on shopping-related activities for the domestic dimension in a month. When it comes to shopping, women spend significantly more time each month than men do. These include purchasing food, fruits, and vegetables, shopping for appliances and supplies for the home, personal shopping, and traveling for home-related activities. Males dedicate 5.4, 6.6, 5.1, 4, and 9.1 hours a month to the activities. In contrast, females devote 6.8, 7, 13.9, 6.3, and 8.9 hours per month to the activities. Compared to men, women spend more time shopping for appliances and household goods.

Figure 6:

Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on the Collection of Household Supplies for Domestic Care Dimension

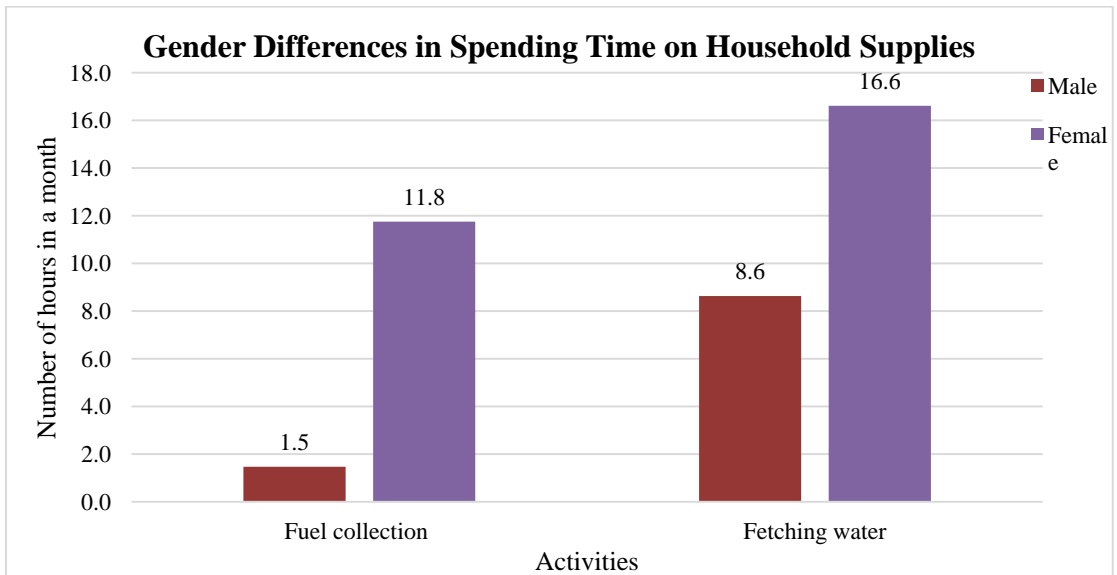


Figure 6 shows the gender differences in the time spent collecting household supplies for domestic care in a month. Even though these tasks—such as gathering fuel and obtaining water—are associated with outdoor activities, women spend more time doing them than men. While women spend 11.8 and 16.6 hours a month collecting fuel and getting water, men spend 1.5 and 8.6 hours on similar tasks.

Figure 7:
Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on Gardening, Livestock Care, and Paying Bills in Domestic Care Dimension

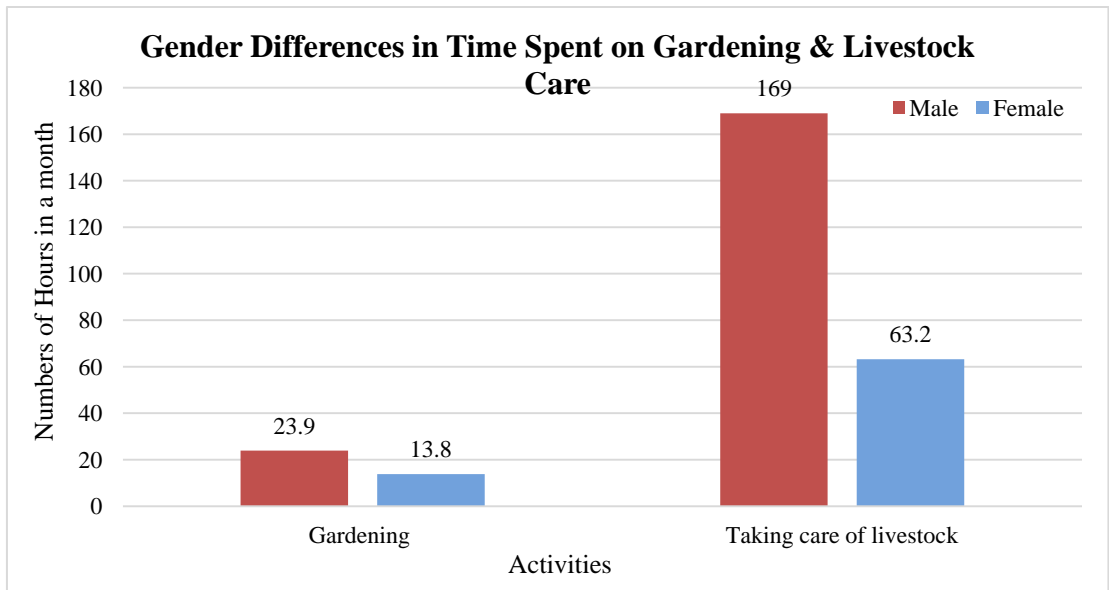


Figure 7 shows the gender differences in the time spent on activities covered under domestic care, including gardening, taking care of livestock, and paying bills. Spending 23.9 hours a month compared to 13.8 hours by females indicates that they have a stronger inclination to gardening. Males devote 168.4 hours a month, compared to 62.3 hours for females, to caring for their livestock, which is a greater amount of time than females. Spending less than an hour a month paying bills is the average for both genders.

Figure 8:
Gender Differences in Total Time Spent on Different Domains of Domestic Care Dimension

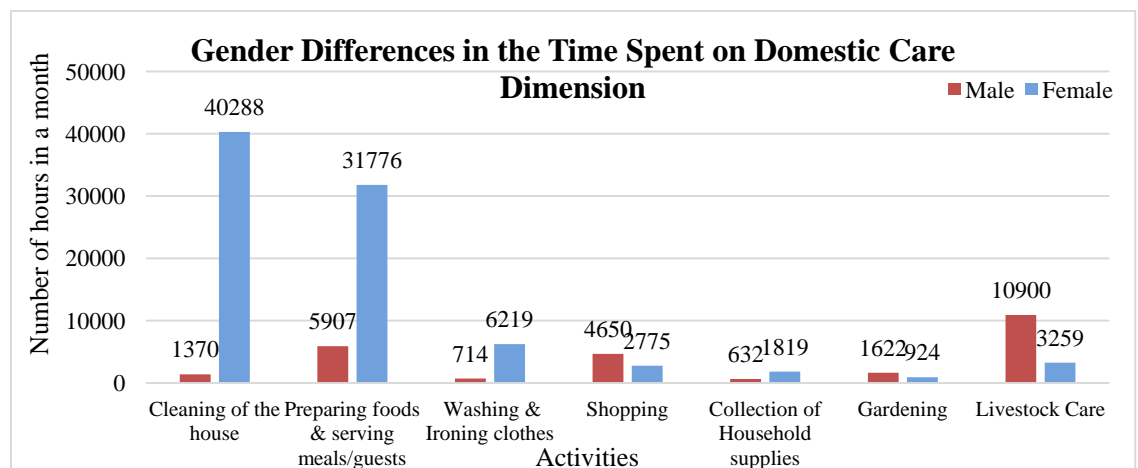


Figure 8 illustrates the gender differences in the total number of hours spent on different dimensions of domestic care in a month. Cleaning the house takes up the most time for women, followed by cooking, serving meals to guests, washing and ironing clothes, livestock care, shopping, collecting household supplies, and gardening. These aspects of household care have 4028, 31776, 6219, 3259, 2775, 1819, and 924 hours a month. The men's time was highest when it came to caring for the livestock (10900 hours), then food preparation and serving (5907 hours), shopping (4650 hours), gardening (1622 hours), house cleaning (1370 hours), laundry and ironing (714 hours), gathering household supplies (632 hours), over a month. Men dedicate more time than women to those aspects of household maintenance, which are associated with tasks carried out outside the home (e.g., shopping, gardening, caring for animals, and bill payment). Conversely, women outnumber men in time spent on inside chores such as cooking, cleaning, and pressing clothes.

Figure 9:

Gender Differences in Total Time Per Month Spent on Domestic Care Activities

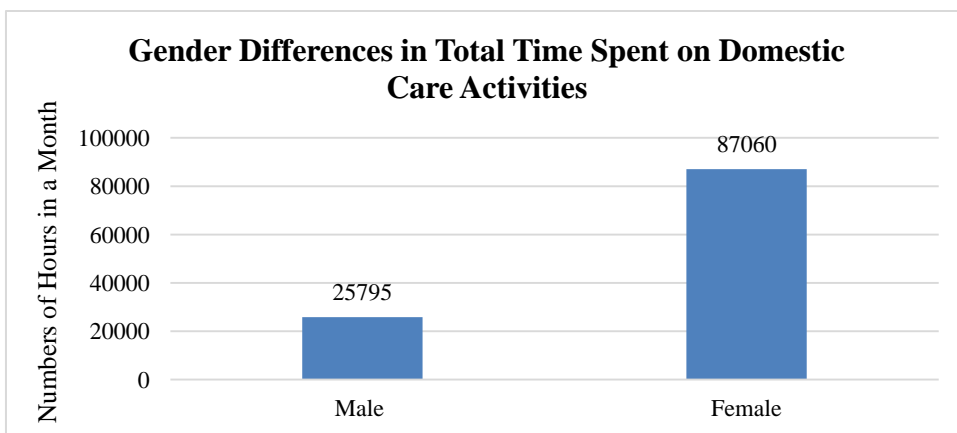


Figure 9 shows the total time males and females spend monthly on 20 domestic care activities. It reveals that females spend around 87060 hours monthly on all domestic care activities. Meanwhile, males spend 25795 hours on domestic care activities in a month. It is pertinent to mention that females spend almost 2 times more time on domestic care activities than males.

Table 2:

Contribution of Males and Females Towards Care Economy

S#	Time Spent on Domestic care work	Male	Female
1	Average Time Spent in a day (in hours)	2.3	7.4
2	Total Time spent in a month (in hours)	25795	87060

Table 2 presents the time both males and females spend on domestic care activities and clearly reflects their contribution to the care economy. Women allocate an average of 7.4 hours per day to domestic tasks, while males allocate 2.3 hours per day. This pattern is evident in the total monthly contributions, where men and women devote 25,795 and 87,060

hours to domestic care responsibilities each month. These statistics underscore the gender disparities in contribution to the care economy by emphasizing women's greater time commitment to domestic care.

Gender Differences in the Economic Values of Domestic Care

Calculation of economic value:

Following the study of Suh (201), the economic value of domestic care activities was calculated by using the following formula:

$$V = \sum_{i=1}^N [D_i f_i (H_i * 60 + M_i) / 60] * W_j$$

Where V is the total economic value of all respondents for performing composite domestic and care activity,

D_i = No. of days performed a certain activities in a month by a respondent

f_i = frequency of doing certain activity

H_i = Hours spent on a certain activity in a day

M_i = Minutes spent on a certain activity in a day

W_j = wage per hour

The wage rate for calculating the economic value for domestic and care activities is considered the minimum wage, i.e., 32 thousand (w.e.f. July 2023, as announced by the Government of Punjab).

A worker is required 40 hours to work in a week, using the minimum wage, we've converted per hour wage using the formula below:

$$W_j = \frac{32000 \text{ minimum wage in a month}}{(40 * 4) \text{ hours in Month}} = 200 \text{ Rupees per hour}$$

Figure 10:
Gender Differences in the Perceived Economic Value of Domestic Care Dimension

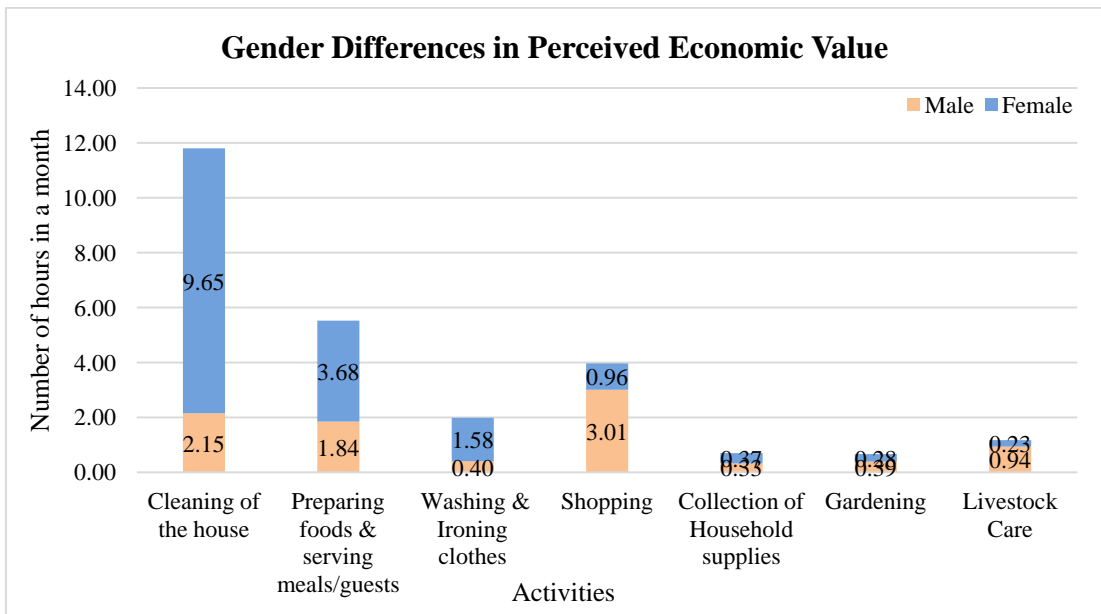


Figure 10 shows the gender differences in the perceived economic values of domestic care activities. Women perceive higher economic values than men for tasks like housecleaning, cooking and serving guests, laundry and ironing, and gathering household supplies. These values are 9.7 million rupees by women versus 2.1 million by men, 3.7 million rupees by women versus 3.7 million by men, 1.6 million rupees by women versus 0.4 by men, and finally 0.4 million rupees by women versus 0.3 million rupees by men. The difference indicates that women devote a disproportionate amount of time to these pursuits, making them more financially valuable. Men place a higher value on activities performed outside the home, such as gardening (0.4 million rupees for men and 0.3 million for women), shopping (3 million rupees for men and 1 million for women), and taking care of livestock (0.6 million rupees for men and 0.2 million for women). Since men perform most of the responsibilities involved in bill payment, the perceived value of men is demonstrated in this action, amounting to 0.3 million rupees.

Figure 11:
Gender Differences in the Market-Based-Economic Value of Domestic Care Dimension

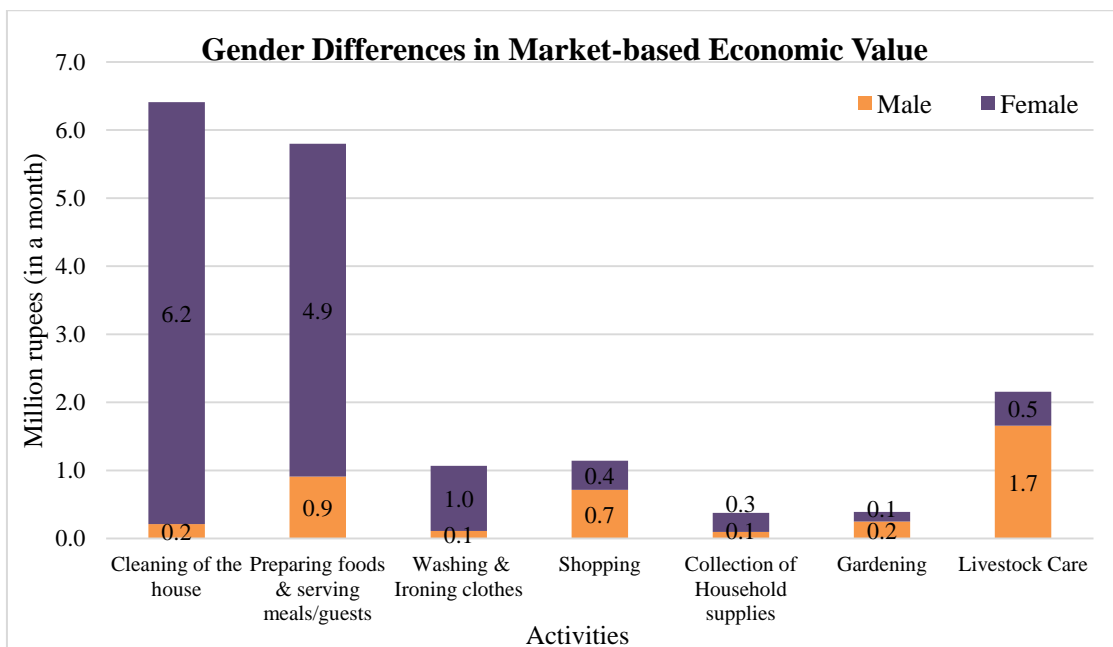


Figure 11 shows the gender differences in the market-based economic value in domestic care activities calculated at 153.85 rupees/hr. In comparison to men, women's market-based economic values are higher in the following areas: housecleaning (6.2 million rupees versus 0.2 million by men), food preparation and guest service (4.9 million rupees versus 0.9 million by men), laundry and ironing (1 million rupees versus 0.1 million by men), and gathering supplies for the home (i.e., 0.3 million rupees by females and 0.1 million by males). Males in this market have higher market-based economic values than females for activities like shopping, gardening, and caring for livestock. These values are 0.7 million rupees for males versus 0.7 million for females, 0.2 million rupees for males versus 0.1 million for females and 1.7 million rupees for males versus females. Males here have higher market-based economic values than females for shopping, gardening, and livestock care. These values are 0.7 million rupees for males versus 0.4 million for females, 0.2 million for males versus 0.1 million for females, and 1.7 million rupees for males versus 0.5 million for females. The market-based economic value of domestic duties women perform is higher than that of men, indicating a substantial gender division of labor in the household. This is because women execute these tasks daily.

Figure 12:
Gender Differences in the Market-Based and Perceived Economic Value of Domestic Care

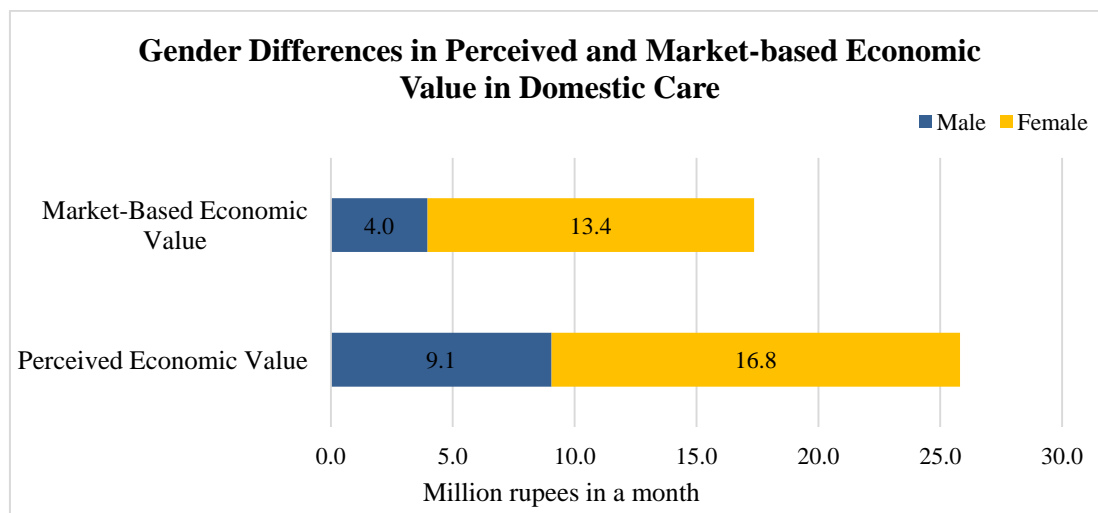


Figure 12 shows the gender differences in the perceived and market-based economic value for different activities in the domestic care dimension. Men and women place a higher overall value on domestic care than market-based economic values, indicating that people who provide it daily recognize its significant worth. The value that women place on domestic care is 16.8 million rupees, compared to 9.1 million rupees for men. The discrepancy indicates that women, who are typically the primary caregivers, know the time, effort, and significance of these duties. Females have a higher market-based economic worth than males, with 13.4 million rupees compared to 4 million rupees.

The discussion of the study is based on the responses to the study's research questions. The first query concerned how much time rural men and women spent performing household care duties. When it comes to all unpaid care duties, women generally spend more time—7.4 hours on average per day—than men, who only spend 2 hours on average. Robles (2010) indicates that women in Ethiopia allocate 36 hours weekly to domestic tasks, whilst men contribute just 7 hours weekly. Fontana and Natali (2008) found that Ghana exhibited the lowest percentage of time allocated to housekeeping. The gendered division of labor arrangement is based on social norms that designate women for caregiving responsibilities. According to Jung & O'Brien, (2017), this story represents various forms of unpaid caregiving and the preservation of society's fabric, placing further pressure on women and girls to perform domestic and caregiving tasks for the benefit of others. In the realm of domestic care, women are performing over three times as much work as men. Specifically, women perform an average of 87,060 hours per month on all domestic care tasks, compared to men's 25,795 hours. The prevalence of conventional home roles, which view household chores as exclusively the responsibility of women, is supported by the predominance of women in the workforce. Even though care is a valued resource for society, families are now primarily responsible for providing care labor. In households, women and girls are primarily responsible for these caregiving tasks (UN Women, 2020). The significant gender difference

in the amount of time spent on these has been highlighted by several studies. Several studies have highlighted the significant gender difference in the time dedicated to these domestic care tasks, with women typically handling most of the burden (Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019).

The study's second research question was about calculating the economic value perceived by the participants and the market-based economic value of all the domestic care activities. The results indicated that the perceived monetary value for the domestic care dimension is highest, with women having a higher monthly value than men (9.1 million rupees against 16.8 million rupees) for females. Caregiving activities are often excluded from economic assessments since they occur in domestic settings and do not provide direct income (Dhungel, 2022; Schulz, & Eden, 2016). Regarding market-based economic value, the value of care activities for women is higher than that of men—13.4 million rupees per month vs 4 million rupees for men. This demonstrates how much the women who perform these tasks regard their contribution to domestic care duties. Despite their critical importance, domestic care activities have historically been marginalized and excluded from the domestic, communal, and/or national economy. This has resulted in perpetuating structural injustices and reinforcing traditional gender norms (UN Women, 2016; Oxfam, 2020). That, in return, not only sustains cycles of poverty and marginalization but also strengthens pre-existing gender inequalities concerning access to resources, employment opportunities, and wages (UN Women, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This research found substantial gender inequalities in time spent and perceived and market-based economic values. The data show that rural women care for their homes for 7.4 hours daily, while men spend 2 hours. According to societal standards, women are supposed to care for others, which explains this inequality. This poll shows that women undertake more than three times as much domestic care as men, averaging 87,060 hours per month compared to 25,795 hours for males. Despite men's rising involvement, traditions that assign home tasks to women preserve this division of labor. The perceived economic advantage of home caring makes women spend more time and appreciate their efforts more. Women think domestic caregiving is worth 9.1 million rupees per month, compared to 16.8 million for men. Market-based assessments value men's caring at 4 million rupees per month and women's at 13.4 million. It is essential to resolve these disparities to promote gender equality, improve the well-being of carers, and recognize the economic value of caregiving activities. Establishing a more equitable and equitable distribution of care work among genders can be facilitated by promoting shared caregiving responsibilities, implementing supportive policies such as flexible work arrangements, and enhancing societal recognition of the importance of caregiving. These results emphasize the need to address the social and economic effects of domestic work gender allocation. Recognizing women's disproportionate burden and the huge economic benefit of their caregiving should help policymakers and society promote fair distribution of caring duties and rules that reflect the true value of domestic labor. This research contributes to the gender parity and structural changes in the caring perception and appreciation debate.

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