

Women and Unpaid Family Work: An empirical study of Kashmir

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Abstract

This paper explores the gendered dimensions of unpaid family work among women in Kashmir, focusing on their participation in household responsibilities and the unequal division of labor. Drawing upon empirical data from 75 women across four districts of the Kashmir Valley Pulwama, Kulgam, Kupwara, and Budgam the study investigates how unpaid work shapes women's social and economic status. Data was collected through a structured, self-designed questionnaire examining patterns of unpaid labor and perceived effects on health and well-being. The study pursues three objectives: (1) to examine gender inequality in women's participation in paid and unpaid work, (2) to analyze intra-household division of labor, and (3) to estimate the time women devote to unpaid work and its implications on their health. Findings reveal that women shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities particularly cooking, childcare, cleaning, and agricultural assistance often without social or economic recognition. Education emerged as a crucial factor enabling women to access paid employment and challenge gendered labor norms. The paper concludes that unpaid work constitutes a key dimension of women's economic disempowerment, perpetuating gender inequality and invisibility in national statistics. It calls for recognition of unpaid labor in policy frameworks, equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities, and greater infrastructural and educational support for women.

Keywords: Unpaid work, Gender inequality, Kashmir, Division of labor, Economic empowerment

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1. Introduction

The valuation of work has long been debated in economic and feminist scholarship, particularly concerning gendered participation in productive and reproductive labor. Across societies, “work” is often narrowly defined as income-generating activity, rendering unpaid domestic tasks largely invisible in economic accounts (ILO & ADB, 2023). This raises a critical question: why is the same tasks such as cooking or caregiving considered productive when performed for wages, but unproductive when done at home?

Unpaid work encompasses the production of goods and services within the household for self-consumption, including food preparation, childcare, elder care, and household management. Although central to family and societal well-being, this labor remains unrecognized in national income statistics, reflecting a gendered bias in the conceptualization of economic productivity (Reskin, 2002). The disproportionate burden of unpaid work not only limits women’s participation in paid employment but also restricts their access to education, income, and decision-making power, thereby constraining their economic empowerment.

Women’s Invisibility in Work

Women’s invisibility in the labor force stems from the coexistence of private and public patriarchy. Within families, private patriarchy assigns household responsibilities to women, while in the public sphere, patriarchal labor structures confine them to informal and low-paying work. Societal attitudes and gender norms reinforce these roles, restricting women’s mobility and employment opportunities. Feminist theories from liberal to radical highlight that gender inequality is structurally embedded in both public and private domains, where men hold economic and decision-making authority while women perform undervalued reproductive labor.

Social and Cultural Processes

From birth, women are socialized into subordinate roles through family, education, and cultural norms that dictate gendered behavior. Practices such as child marriage, limited access to education, and restrictions on mobility reinforce dependence and economic marginalization. These factors are particularly pronounced in rural regions, where patriarchal control and lack of infrastructure intensify women’s unpaid workload. Consequently, unpaid work is both a cause and a consequence of women’s social subordination.

Unpaid Work and Gendered Division of Labor

The gender division of labor assigns productive, income-generating roles to men and reproductive, care-based responsibilities to women. This unequal distribution persists across class, caste, and region. Rural women, especially, carry the double burden of domestic chores and agricultural labor without recognition or remuneration. Time-use studies indicate that women spend significantly more hours on unpaid work compared to men (Budlender, 2007). The resulting “time poverty” limits their ability to engage in paid work, pursue education, or participate in community decision-making.

Despite economic growth, only about 15% of Indian women earn income for their labor compared to over 50% of men (Mazumdar & Neetha, 2018). The rest remain financially dependent, their contribution uncounted in GDP metrics. In rural Kashmir, this invisibility is exacerbated by poverty, limited access to resources, and conservative social norms that define domestic work as a woman's moral duty rather than a form of labor.

Interconnection between Paid and Unpaid Work

Paid and unpaid work are deeply intertwined. Women's extensive unpaid labor underpins the functioning of the paid economy by sustaining households and the labor force. Yet, since unpaid work remains excluded from national accounting systems, policy interventions often overlook it. The unequal division of domestic labor creates hierarchical relationships within households and perpetuates women's lower economic status. Recognizing unpaid work through time-use surveys and social policy is essential to achieving gender equity in both private and public spheres.

The Kashmiri Context

The situation in Kashmir mirrors these broader patterns but is compounded by conflict, economic uncertainty, and rural underdevelopment. Women contribute significantly to household sustenance through agriculture, caregiving, and domestic management, yet their work remains largely invisible. This study focuses on rural women from four districts of the Kashmir Valley — Pulwama, Kulgam, Kupwara, and Budgam — including the Tral area of Pulwama district, examining how unpaid family work affects their health, autonomy, and participation in community life.

2. Review of Literature

The literature on women's unpaid work demonstrates that gendered divisions of labor persist globally, constraining women's access to economic resources and social recognition. Unpaid care and domestic work, central to household and community sustenance, remain invisible in economic statistics and undervalued in public policy (ILO & ADB, 2023). Scholars across feminist economics, sociology, and development studies have repeatedly emphasized that women's unpaid contributions sustain both families and markets but seldom receive institutional acknowledgment (Hirway, 2021; Folbre, 2020).

Gender inequality in work has deep historical roots. In India, prescriptive texts such as *Manusmriti* codified women's dependence and domestic confinement (Chakravarti, 2018). Over time, this ideology was reinforced through patriarchy that restricts women to caregiving and household management while men dominate the productive and public spheres (Boserup & Kanji, 2007).

Theorists link this to the *gender division of labor*—the social allocation of productive roles to men and reproductive roles to women (Bidner & Eswaran, 2015). Feminist scholarship from liberal to radical interprets this as a systemic form of oppression where unpaid household work underpins both patriarchy and capitalism. Federici (2021) and Fraser (2016) argue that

domestic labor subsidizes capitalist production by reducing the cost of waged labor, while Marxian and socialist feminists highlight its role in reproducing labor power without remuneration.

Feminist development discourse has shifted from *Women in Development (WID)* to *Women and Development (WAD)* and later to *Gender and Development (GAD)* approaches (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Cornwall et al., 2007). Each stage progressively emphasized structural inequality rather than individual advancement. Duflo (2012) underlines that gender equality is integral to human development but hindered by socio-economic barriers limiting women's access to resources and labor markets.

In India, feminist mobilization evolved in three waves: the 19th-century reform movements against social evils; the early 20th-century struggle for political participation and autonomy; and the post-independence focus on equality in home, workplace, and governance (Forbes, 1996; Menon, 2015; Roy, 2018). Despite this progress, patriarchal norms and socio-cultural taboos continue to restrict women's work participation and recognition (Ghosh, 2021; Chandra, 2005).

The domestic division of labor where men bear financial responsibility and women perform unpaid care and household tasks remains a major axis of gender inequality (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Women's self-perception of domestic work as a moral duty perpetuates this imbalance (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Studies reveal that women perform most of the world's unpaid care work which is around 75 percent globally and 10–12 times more than men in India (Ferrant et al., 2014; NSSO, 2020).

Feminist economists like Fine (2002) and England & Budig (2021) observe that unpaid domestic work indirectly subsidizes capitalist economies by lowering household expenditure and enabling men to work for lower wages. This dual system male paid labor and female unpaid labor results in the *double* and even *triple burden* for women, combining market, domestic, and reproductive roles (Folbre, 2020).

Discrimination in the labor market is reflected in lower participation, occupational segregation, and wage disparities (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Goldin, 2021). Unpaid work responsibilities further reduce women's capacity to engage in formal employment or pursue higher-level positions. Globalization and technological change have opened new avenues but also reinforced flexible and part-time work models that often limit career progression (Elson & Pearson, 1981).

In India, over 90 percent of female workers are in the informal sector, many as unpaid family laborers (Swaminathan, 2009; Mazumdar & Neetha, 2018). NSSO data reveal declining rural female labor-force participation from 126 million in 2004-05 to 103 million in 2011-12 while the proportion engaged in domestic duties rose sharply (NSSO, 2013). These statistics demonstrate how unpaid household work displaces women from formal economic activity.

Marriage, childcare, and migration further constrain women's employment. Cultural expectations often force women to withdraw from the labor market after marriage or childbirth, limiting skill development and income continuity (Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Desai & Banerji, 2008). The absence of supportive infrastructure such as childcare services and maternity benefits aggravates this gendered exclusion, particularly in rural India.

Unpaid work is not separate from paid employment but underlies it. Women's time and labor sustain household functioning and the productive economy, yet remain excluded from GDP estimation (Benería, 2016). Time-use surveys show that unpaid work time often equals or exceeds that spent in paid employment (Swiebel, 1999). The unequal division of unpaid work, therefore, directly shapes women's access to paid work and reinforces the "care penalty" in earnings (Razavi, 2012).

Agriculture exemplifies the invisibility of women's labor. Rural women undertake multiple unpaid activities crop management, livestock care, food processing, water and fuel collection—that are vital to family welfare but rarely classified as "economic work" (FAO, 2020; Agarwal, 1997). They supply significant manual labor in farming while men control income and decision-making (Srivastava & Ravi, 2010). Limited education, caste hierarchies, and poor infrastructure further entrench this unpaid workload (Holmstrom, 1981; Kalia, 2005).

Indian feminist scholars have highlighted that official statistics systematically undercount women's work. Census 2001 classified over 36 crore women as "non-workers," grouping them with dependents, beggars, and prisoners, despite their daily contribution to household maintenance (Choudhary et al., 2009). Such categorization obscures the true scale of women's labor and its economic value.

Time-Use Surveys conducted in the late 1990s (Palriwala & Neetha, 2010) provided the first systematic attempt to measure unpaid work in India, revealing that women spend nearly five to six hours daily on unpaid domestic and care activities compared to men's 30–40 minutes. However, despite these insights, unpaid work remains outside formal policy frameworks.

Government programs indirectly benefit from women's unpaid labor by reducing the need for public spending on childcare, health, and elder care. This "hidden subsidy" transfers costs from the state to women, reinforcing gendered inequity in social reproduction (Antonopoulos & Hirway, 2010). Thus, infrastructure deficits lack of water, electricity, childcare centers translate directly into longer unpaid work hours for women.

At the international level, the issue gained prominence after the 1975 UN Conference on Women in Mexico City and subsequent summits at Copenhagen (1995) and Beijing (1995). The UNDP (1999) Human Development Report estimated that women perform over half of the world's total work hours, two-thirds of which are unpaid. These findings established the need to integrate unpaid work into national accounting systems and to promote shared domestic responsibilities through gender-sensitive policy frameworks.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that despite decades of feminist advocacy, unpaid work remains undervalued in both scholarship and policy. In India, especially in rural contexts like Kashmir, empirical research quantifying women's unpaid family work is limited. Most existing studies focus on national or urban settings, leaving regional disparities underexplored. This gap underscores the need for localized studies that analyze how unpaid work affects women's health, autonomy, and participation in the labor market. The present research seeks to address this gap through empirical investigation across five sampling localities within four districts of Kashmir, situating women's unpaid labor within its socio-economic and cultural specificities.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method empirical design to analyze women's unpaid household work and its socio-economic implications. Both primary and secondary data was utilized to understand the extent, nature, and impact of unpaid work performed by women in rural Kashmir. The research aimed to quantify women's participation in unpaid domestic activities while also capturing their lived experiences and perceptions regarding gendered labor divisions.

The methodology was guided by three core objectives:

1. To examine gender inequality in women's participation in paid and unpaid work.
2. To analyze the division of labor within households.
3. To estimate the time women, spend on unpaid work and its effects on their health and well-being.

The study covered four districts of the Kashmir Valley Pulwama, Kulgam, Kupwara, and Budgam representing diverse rural and semi-urban socio-economic conditions. To ensure adequate representation within Pulwama district, which is geographically large and socio-economically diverse, data collection was further disaggregated across two localities within it: the Pulwama town area and the Tral area. Respondents were accordingly drawn from five sampling localities in total Pulwama, Tral, Kulgam, Kupwara, and Budgam nested within the four districts named above.

A purposive random sampling technique was employed to select 75 women respondents, aged between 20 and 60 years, from various villages across these districts. The sample included women of different educational levels, marital statuses, and occupational backgrounds to ensure representativeness.

Primary data formed the core of the analysis and was collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire, developed by the researcher under expert supervision, comprised both closed and open-ended questions to elicit quantitative as well as qualitative insights. It covered questions related to demographic characteristics, work-related information and attitudinal questions. Direct observations and informal

discussions supplemented the interviews to provide contextual understanding of the respondents' daily routines and community dynamics. Secondary data were gathered from books, journals, government reports, and newspaper articles to frame the study within broader theoretical and policy debates on unpaid work and gender inequality. National sources such as NSSO reports, Time Use Surveys, and relevant UN and ILO publications were consulted to compare regional findings with national and international trends.

The collected data were systematically organized, coded, and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Responses were checked for accuracy and completeness, and coded into relevant thematic categories (e.g., time use, gender roles, health outcomes). Key variables were summarized into tables and charts for descriptive analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using simple percentages and frequency distributions to identify patterns and trends.

Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed to interpret women's subjective experiences, focusing on issues such as invisibility of labor, social recognition, and perceptions of fairness in domestic work distribution. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the data collection and reporting process. The integration of both statistical and narrative data enabled a holistic understanding of the gendered dimensions of unpaid family work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study focuses on 'women and unpaid family work' which affects their health and other important factors which are equally important in deciding the nature and quantum of women's work. Therefore, the present section will discuss how factors like marriage, age and others affect the women time use patterns.

Table 4.1 Distribution of the respondents as per Age

Age in Years	No. of respondents(N)	Percentage (%)
20-30 years	6	8.0
30-40 years	31	41.3
40-50 years	16	21.3
50-60 years	22	29.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.1 represents the age distribution of the respondents. The majority of the respondents, 41.3% (N=31), fall in the age group of 30-40 years, followed by respondents aged 50-60 years comprising 29.3% (N=22) of the total sample. The age group of 40-50 years accounts for 21.3% (N=16) of respondents, while a smaller portion, 8.0% (N=6), falls in the age group of 20-30 years. This distribution indicates that the sample was predominantly

composed of women in their middle adulthood, a life stage typically associated with peak domestic and caregiving responsibilities.

Table 4.2 Distribution of the respondents as per Educational Status

Educational Status	Number of respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	39	52.0
Primary	13	17.3
Matric	9	12.0
Graduate	11	14.7
Post Graduate	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.2 provides an overview of the educational status of respondents. A significant portion of respondents i.e 52% (N=39), were illiterate, which represents the highest category of the respondents which was followed by 17.3% (N=13) of respondents with a primary-level of education and 14.7% (N=11) had completed graduation. The remaining 12% (N=9) of the respondents were matric, and a smaller proportion i.e. only 4% (N=3), hold postgraduate degree.

Table 4.3 Distribution of the respondents as per Marital Status

Marital Status	N0. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Married	65	86.6
Unmarried	2	2.7
Separated	1	1.3
Divorced	2	2.7
Widow	5	6.7
Total	75	100.0

The above table reveals the marital status of the respondents. The majority of respondents were married, accounting to 86.6% (N=65) of the total sample, suggesting a prevalence of marital stability within the group. Small percentage were represented by widows, who make up 6.7% (N=5) and those who were divorced were 2.7% (N=2). Additionally, both unmarried and separated categories were represented by 2.7% (N=2) and 1.3% (N=1) of respondents respectively.

Table 4.4. Type of Family

Type of family	Number of respondents	Percentage
Joint family	53	70.7
Nuclear family	22	29.3
Total	75	100

Table 4.4 shows that most of the respondents were from joint families, i.e., 70.7% (N=53), while the remaining 29.3% (N=22) were from nuclear families. In joint-family settings, women's unpaid workload is often intensified, as they are expected to manage domestic responsibilities not only for their own household but also for extended family members, further increasing the overall work burden.

Table 4.5 Distribution of the respondents as per Occupation

Occupation	No .of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Housewife	72	96.0
Working women	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.5 illustrates the occupational status of respondents. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 96.0% (N=72), were housewives, indicating a high prevalence of non-employed women within the sample, while only 4.0% (N=3) of respondents were engaged in paid work outside the home.

Table 4.6 Distribution of the respondents as per Husband's Occupation

Husband's Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Govt Employee	7	9.3
Business man	44	58.7
Farmer	2	2.7
Labour	9	12.0
Imam	7	9.3
Carpenter, Driver, Plumber & Pvt Teacher	6	8.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.6 illustrates the occupational distribution of the respondent's husbands, showing a diverse range of professions. The largest group, 58.7% (N=44), were engaged in business, reflecting a strong presence of entrepreneurial activity among the respondents' households.

Labourers make up the second-largest category, comprising 12.0% (N=9), followed by government employees and Imams, who each represent 9.3% (N=7) of the sample. Husbands working as carpenters, drivers, plumbers, or private teachers together account for 8.0% (N=6), while only 2.7% (N=2) are engaged in farming.

Table 4.7 Distribution of the respondents as per Family Monthly Income

Family Income	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Rs. <15000	26	34.7
Rs. 15000-25000	9	12.0
Rs. 25000-35000	7	9.3
Rs. 35000-45000	7	9.3
Rs. 45000-55000	6	8.0
Rs. 55000-65000	8	10.7
Rs. >65000	12	16.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.7 represents the monthly family income of the respondents, showing significant income variation within the sample. The largest income bracket, representing 34.7% (N=26), is for households earning less than Rs. 15,000 per month, indicating that a substantial proportion of the sample belongs to low-income households. Households with an income exceeding Rs. 65,000 make up 16.0% (N=12), while those earning Rs. 55,000 and Rs. 65,000 represent 10.7% (N=8). Those earning Rs. 15,000-25,000 comprise 12.0% (N=9) of the sample.

However, it was found that 9.3 % of the respondents had a monthly income of Rs. 25,000-35,000 and Rs. 35,000-45,000 respectively

Table 4.8 Distribution of the Respondents by Sampling Locality

Locality	No. of Respondents	Percent
Pulwama	15	20.0
Kulgam	15	20.0
Kupwara	15	20.0
Tral Pulwama	15	20.0
Budgam	15	20.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.8 outlines the geographical distribution of the respondents by sampling locality. The sample was evenly distributed across five localities, with each locality accounting for 20% (N=15) of the respondents. Four of these Kulgam, Kupwara, Budgam, and Pulwama town correspond to distinct districts, while the fifth, Tral, is an administrative area within Pulwama

district that was sampled separately to capture its distinct socio-economic profile. In total, the sample therefore spans four districts of the Kashmir Valley, with equal representation across all five sampling localities.

Table 4.9: Activities Performed

Activities performed	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Care giving	7	9.3
Household chores	13	17.3
Care giving & household chores	3	4.0
Household & Agriculture	1	1.3
Firewood collection	3	4.0
Agriculture	19	25.4
All of the above	29	38.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.9 highlights the primary types of unpaid work the respondents were engaged in, showcasing a variety of responsibilities. The most common response, reported by 38.7% (N=29) of respondents, was engagement in all of the listed activities simultaneously, indicating a substantial multi-tasked workload. Agriculture alone was the primary activity for 25.4% (N=19) of respondents, while 17.3% (N=13) were engaged solely in household chores. Caregiving alone accounted for 9.3% (N=7) of respondents. Smaller proportions combined caregiving with household chores (4.0%, N=3) or were engaged solely in firewood collection (4.0%, N=3), while only 1.3% (N=1) combined household chores with agriculture.

A study conducted by Singh et al. (2020) reveals that rural women have multiple predefined traditional work schedule, as she must perform all the household responsibilities such as collecting firewood, washing, cultivating and husbandry.

Table 4.10: Working hours per day

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
5-7 hours	21	28.0
7-9 hours	27	36.0
9-11 hours	16	21.3
11-13 hours	11	14.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.10 describes the number of hours respondents dedicate to unpaid work each day.

The most frequently reported daily work duration was 7-9 hours, accounting for 36.0% (N=27) of respondents, indicating a substantial time commitment to unpaid work. It was further

found that 28.0% (N=21) of respondents worked between 5-7 hours daily, while 21.3% (N=16) reported working 9-11 hours. Respondents working 11-13 hours per day represent 14.7 % (N=11).

Table 4.11: Acknowledging the work done

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	29	38.7
No	46	61.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.11 provides insight into whether respondents feel their work was acknowledged by other family member and society at large. Majority i.e. 38.7% (N=29), respondents were of the opinion that their efforts were being recognized, while 61.3% (N=46) stated that their work goes unacknowledged.

Table 4.12: Requit for your work

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	3	4.0
No	72	96.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.12 examines whether respondents receive any requital for their unpaid work. Majority of the respondents i.e 96% (N=72) revealed that they did not receive any requital of their work. Only a meager percentage reported that they are being redressed which accounts for 4%.

Mehrotra et al. (2014) reported that in a country like India , merely 22% of women are engaged in workforce and out of them 70% are associated with activities that are informal in nature with little or no economic remuneration or social recognition and almost zero access to social protection.

Table 4.13: Satisfaction level of respondents

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	61	81.3
No	14	18.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.13 reflects the satisfaction level of respondents with their work. A substantial number i.e 81.3% (N=61) reported being satisfied with their work, thus indicating a sense of personal fulfillment despite the challenges associated with unpaid labor. Conversely, 18.7% (N=14) express dissatisfaction, which may reflect the hardships, lack of compensation, or lack of acknowledgement associated with their roles.

Table 4.14: Time spent on other activities

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Leisure	13	17.3
Self-care	55	73.3
Education	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.14 shows how respondents distribute their time between unpaid work and other activities. The majority (73.3%, N=55) of respondents reported dedicating their remaining time to self-care, while 17.3% (N=13) spent it on leisure activities. A smaller group, comprising 9.3% (N=7), allocates time for education.

Table 4.15: Effect of work burden upon health of the respondents

Health Problems	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Weakness	5	6.67
Fatigue	10	13.33
Physical strain	3	4.00
Body aches	38	50.67
Exhaustion	8	10.67
No effect	11	14.67
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.15 examines the impact of unpaid work on respondents' health. Half of the respondents (50.67%, N=38) reported experiencing body aches due to their unpaid responsibilities, while 13.33% (N=10) experienced fatigue. Additionally, 10.67% (N=8) reported they feel exhausted and 6.67% (N=5) mentioned weakness because of their daily work. A smaller percentage, 4.0% (N=3), cited physical strain and 14.67% (N=11) shows that unpaid work had no effect on their health.

A similar study conducted by Hussain et al. (2011) stated that domestic work needs sufficient time and women in particular work for whole day and their health gets affected due to over load of work.

Table 4.16: Opinion about unpaid work

Statement	No. of Respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Believe unpaid work is solely a woman's responsibility		
Yes	30	40.0
No	45	60.0
Total	75	100.0
Expect society values unpaid work		
Yes	2	2.7
No	73	97.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.16 divulges the outlook of respondents towards their work which they believe is solely a woman's responsibility. A majority of respondents i. e 60%, (N=45) disagreed with the idea that unpaid work is exclusively for women, while 40% (N=30) believed it wholly and solely a woman's duty. These responses reflect a diverse perspective on gender roles in unpaid work. Furthermore, the above table addresses society's view on unpaid work versus paid work. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 97.3% (N=73), believed that society does not value unpaid work as much as paid work, while only 2.7% (N=2) felt that society values both equally.

Table 4.17: Opinion of Society and role of education

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Experienced any family, social or cultural pressure to perform unpaid work		
Yes	42	56.0
No	33	44.0
Total	75	100.0
Unpaid work limits your ability to pursue education or employment opportunities		
Yes	57	76.0
No	18	24.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.16 highlights whether respondents experienced any family, social, or cultural pressure to engage in unpaid work. Almost half of the respondents i. e 56%, (N=42) revealed that they were being pressurized to perform unpaid work, while 44% (N=33) did not experience such pressures from family and society at large.

It further focuses on whether unpaid work limits respondents' ability to pursue education or employment opportunities. A significant portion of respondents (76%, N=57) reported that

unpaid work restricted their ability to engage in educational or employment pursuits, while 24% (N=18) stated it did not hinder these opportunities.

Table 4.18: Decision Making issues related to Finance

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	37	49.3
No	38	50.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.18 reveals that nearly half of the respondents, 49.3% (N=37), report having control over household financial decision making power within their family, while as many as 50.7% (N=38) indicate they don't take part in decision making related to finance in their family.

Table 4.19: Biggest challenges you faced in your daily life as a rural woman

Challenges faced by rural women	No. of respondents	Percentage
Limited education	9	12.0
Gender based violence	4	5.3
Social isolation	11	14.7
Low income	9	12.0
No recognition	4	5.3
Balancing work	15	20.0
Lack of time	5	6.7
Financial struggles	18	24.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.19, focusses attention on the various challenges faced by these women in their day-to-day life. Financial struggles were the most reported challenge, affecting 24.0% (N=18) of respondents. Balancing work was the next prevalent issue being reported by these women i.e 20.0% (N=15), social isolation was another big issue faced by them which accounts for 14.7% (N=11). Additionally, gender-based violence and a lack of recognition were another obstacle faced by them accounting to 5.3% (N=4) each, and 6.7% (N=5) of the sample experience time constraints as a significant hurdle in their daily lives.

Table 4.20: Addressing Unpaid work

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Govt support and policy formulation	31	41.3
Community events	22	29.3
Recognition	9	12.0
Monetary compensation	8	10.7
Caregiving support system	5	6.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.20, a significant portion of respondents, 41.3% (N=31), believe that policy support is key to recognizing unpaid work. Community events were also considered a means for acknowledgment by 29.3% (N=22), followed by 12.0% (N=9) who simply feel their work should be recognized in general. Monetary compensation was desired by 10.7% (N=8), while 6.7% (N=5) see the establishment of a caregiver support system as a valuable form of recognition for unpaid work.

Table 4.21: Opinion regarding work distribution

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	75	100.0
No	0	0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.21 reveals the opinion of respondents regarding the distribution of work. All respondents (100.0%, N=75) unanimously agreed that unpaid work should be distributed more equitably among all family members.

Table 4.22: Type of work that is generally taken care by women

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Household chores	28	37.3
Domestic work/ Agriculture/ Animal Husbandry	32	42.7
Caregiving	3	4.0
All of the above	12	16.0
Total	75	100.0

The above table depicts the type of work generally taken care of by women. The largest percentage, 42.7% (N=32), Domestic work/ Agriculture/ Animal Husbandry, followed by

37.3% (N=28) for household chores. 16.0% (N=16) of the respondents indicated that all of the above tasks are typically managed by women. Only 4.0% (N=3) of the respondents mentioned caregiving as a task exclusively handled by women.

Table 4.23: Most time consuming activities

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Cooking	16	21.3
Cleaning	22	29.3
Agriculture	12	16.0
Childcare	5	6.7
Firewood collection	6	8.0
Fetching water	2	2.7
Laundry	5	6.7
All of the above	7	9.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.23, shows the most time-consuming activities, as reported by the women respondents was cleaning which accounts for 29.3% (N=22) that requires a significant amount of time. Cooking was also a major time-consuming task, with 21.3% (N=16) of the participants reporting it. Other activities such as agriculture (16.0%, N=12), childcare

(6.7%, N=5), firewood collection (8.0%, N=6), fetching water (2.7%, N=2), and laundry (6.7%, N=5) were mentioned by fewer respondents. Interestingly, 9.3% (N=7) of the respondents noted that all of the listed activities are equally time-consuming.

Table 4.24: Interventions suggested by women

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Network support	10	13.3
Shared household responsibilities	42	56.0
Housekeeping services	3	4.0
Domestic help	17	22.7
supporting her decision	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.24 presents the responses of women regarding possible substitutes or supports for their unpaid work. The majority, 56.0% (N=42), suggested sharing household responsibilities more equitably as the most viable solution. Domestic help was the next most common suggestion, proposed by 22.7% (N=17) of respondents, followed by network support

from family or community, proposed by 13.3% (N=10). Housekeeping services and support for women's own decision-making were each suggested by 4.0% (N=3) of respondents.

Table 4.25: Role of education in unpaid work

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	72	96.0
No	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.25, illustrates the role of education in the unpaid work which women performs daily. A large majority, 96.0% (f=72), agreed that education plays a significant role in enabling work participation. Only 4.0% (f=3) of the respondents disagreed, suggesting that education does not play a significant role in work participation.

Education plays a significant role in bringing changes in the gendered norms of a society that have significant impact on women's work status (Marphatic & Moussie, 2013).

Table 4.26: Time Spent by women on Animal husbandry (Collection of fodders, cutting of fodders, caving of water to animals, giving of food , washing animals , cleaning cow sheds)

Time Spent/ day	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1-3 hours	69	92.0
4-6 hours	6	8.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.26 illustrates the *Time spent on Animal Husbandry i.e., Collection of Fodders*,

Cutting of Fodders, Carrying Water to Animals, Giving Food, Washing Animals, Cleaning Cow Sheds, it was found that the large majority of respondents, 92.0% (N=69), spent between 1 and 3 hours per day on animal husbandry-related tasks, while the remaining 8.0% (N=6) spent between 4 and 6 hours daily on these activities.

Table 4.27: Time Spent on Cooking (Preparing breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Time Spent/ day	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1-3 hours	64	85.3
3-5 hours	11	14.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.27, shows *Time Used on Cooking ,preparing Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* 85.3% (N=64) of respondents stated that they spent between 1 and 3 hours on cooking daily, while the remaining 14.7% (N=11) spent between 3 and 5 hours. Overall, the data reflect the significant amount of time dedicated to cooking activities by the respondents.

Table 4.28: Time spent on Domestic work (washing of clothes, utensils, cleaning floors)

Time spent/ Day	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1-3 hours	71	94.7
5-6 hours	4	5.3
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.28, shows Time spent on Domestic Work like Washing Clothes, Utensils, Cleaning Floors etc, the large majority of respondents, 94.7% (N=71), spent between 1 and 3 hours on domestic work daily, while the remaining 5.3% (N=4) spent between 5 and 6 hours.

Table 4.29: Time spent on Childcare (Feeding, sending them to school, bathing, dressing, etc)

Time spent/ Day	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Not applicable	11	14.7
1-3 hours	56	74.7
3-6 hours	8	10.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.29, illustrates the time spent on Childcare which includes feeding, sending them to school, bathing, dressing, etc. 14.7% (N=11) of respondents reported that childcare was not applicable to them. Among the remaining respondents, the majority, 74.7% (N=56), spent between 1 and 3 hours daily on childcare, while 10.7% (N=8) spent between 3 and 6 hours.

Table 4.30: Time Spent on Personal care (sleeping, taking rest, recreation, shopping, etc)

Time spent on personal care	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1-2 hour	52	69.33
3-4hours	18	24.0
More than 5 hours	5	6.7
Total	75	100.0

Table 4.30, illustrated time used on Personal Care (Sleeping, Taking Rest, Recreation, Shopping, Others). It was found that 69.3% (N=52) of the respondents spend 1-2 hours on

personal care activities. 24.0% (N=18) spent 3-4 hours and a small percentage of women, i.e., 6.7% (N=5), spent more than 5 hours on personal care.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals significant socio-economic and gendered dimensions of unpaid work among women. A majority of respondents belonged to the 30–40-year age group, were married, and lived in joint family structures. More than half of them were illiterate, with only a small proportion having received higher education. The overwhelming majority were housewives, while their husbands were predominantly engaged in business activities. The respondents represented five sampling localities within four districts, with variations in household income levels, reflecting diverse socio-economic contexts.

Unpaid work largely consisted of caregiving, household chores, and agricultural labour, with most women spending between seven and nine hours daily on such activities. Despite the extensive time commitment, their labour remained unacknowledged and uncompensated, highlighting its invisibility within conventional economic frameworks. Although many women expressed personal satisfaction with their contributions, a large proportion also reported health issues such as body aches and fatigue, indicating the physical toll of this work.

The findings also reveal strong gender norms shaping household responsibilities. Most respondents rejected the notion that unpaid work is inherently a woman's duty yet acknowledged persistent societal and familial pressures that reinforced this division of labour. Unpaid work significantly restricted their opportunities for education and paid employment, thereby reinforcing cycles of economic dependency. Additionally, nearly half of the respondents reported limited participation in household financial decision-making.

Economic hardship, social isolation, and challenges in maintaining work–life balance emerged as major concerns. Respondents emphasized the need for greater policy support, shared household responsibilities, and formal recognition of unpaid work to address these challenges. Cooking and cleaning were identified as the most time-consuming daily activities, underscoring the routine and repetitive nature of women's unpaid labour. Importantly, education was widely viewed as a critical factor in enhancing women's participation in paid work and improving their overall socio-economic status. This underscores the intersection between gender, labour, and structural inequalities in the valuation of women's work.

These findings resonate with, and extend, the broader feminist-economic literature on unpaid care work. Consistent with Ferrant et al. (2019) and Folbre (2020), the present data confirm that women's unpaid labour functions as a structural subsidy to both the household and the wider economy, one that remains invisible precisely because it falls outside market valuation. Yet the Kashmir findings also complicate a purely economic reading of this invisibility. Whereas much of the international literature treats women's unpaid work primarily as a problem of missing statistical recognition (Hirway, 2021), respondents in this study did not

experience their unpaid labour solely as an accounting omission: a majority expressed subjective satisfaction with their domestic role even as they rejected the notion that such work is exclusively a woman's duty. This coexistence of personal fulfilment and structural inequity echoes Hochschild and Machung's (2012) concept of the "second shift," but the Kashmiri data suggest a further layer, women's moral and emotional investment in caregiving operating alongside, rather than in simple opposition to, their recognition of its unfairness. This nuance is often flattened in aggregate, national-level time-use surveys, underscoring the value of regionally grounded qualitative-quantitative work of the kind undertaken here.

The socio-political specificity of Kashmir further differentiates these findings from comparable studies conducted elsewhere in India. Rural Kashmir's unpaid work burden is shaped not only by patriarchal household structures documented widely in the South Asian literature (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Mazumdar & Neetha, 2018) but also by decades of political conflict and economic uncertainty that have curtailed infrastructural investment, restricted women's mobility, and weakened the formal labour market that might otherwise absorb educated women's labour. Where national studies attribute women's low workforce participation chiefly to social norms and childcare responsibilities (Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Desai & Banerji, 2008), the present sample's near-total concentration in unpaid domestic and agricultural roles (96.0%, N=72, housewives) suggests that in Kashmir this pattern is compounded by a narrower range of local paid-employment opportunities and by conflict-related disruptions to schooling and mobility that have historically limited girls' educational attainment. This helps explain why illiteracy (52.0%, N=39) remained so high in the sample relative to some other Indian states, and why the minority of women with higher education were disproportionately more likely to report autonomy and participation in paid work, a pattern broadly consistent with Duflo's (2012) observation that the empowerment-development relationship is neither automatic nor uniform across contexts.

At the same time, the joint family structure that characterised 70.7% (N=53) of surveyed households appears to have a double-edged effect that is worth foregrounding in a way the existing literature does not always capture. While joint families are often theorised as a source of social support for women, particularly in caregiving, the present data suggest that in the Kashmiri context they more often intensify unpaid workloads, since women are expected to extend domestic labour to a wider circle of dependents without any redistribution of that labour among adult family members. Read alongside the finding that 97.3% (N=73) of respondents felt society does not value unpaid work as much as paid work, this points to a specifically regional configuration of the "care penalty" described by Razavi (2012): one shaped less by formal labour-market discrimination than by the household- and community-level norms that govern who is expected to absorb the unpaid workload created by joint-family living. Future comparative research across conflict-affected and non-conflict rural regions of India would help clarify how far these dynamics are attributable to the Kashmiri context specifically, as opposed to joint-family systems more broadly.

It is also important to situate these findings within the methodological limits of the study. The purposive sampling strategy and modest sample size (N=75), while appropriate for

an in-depth, community-grounded inquiry, restrict the statistical generalizability of the findings to the wider population of Kashmiri women, a limitation also worth mentioning. This study is therefore best read as an exploratory regional case study that complements, rather than replaces, larger probability-based surveys such as the NSSO Time Use Survey. Its contribution lies in the qualitative depth and contextual specificity it offers, capturing lived experiences and local meanings of unpaid work that large-scale surveys are structurally unable to register.

These findings speak directly to the ongoing debate over the integration of unpaid work into national accounting systems. The System of National Accounts (SNA) continues to exclude non-market household production from GDP calculations, an exclusion that this study's data illustrate concretely: the 92.0% of respondents spending three or more hours daily on animal husbandry alone, or the near-universal engagement in cooking and domestic work, represent substantial economic contributions that remain statistically invisible. India's own Time Use Survey (NSSO, 2020) was a step toward correcting this omission, but its national aggregates conceal exactly the kind of regional and conflict-specific variation this study documents. Satellite accounts that value unpaid work, alongside region-specific time-use data collection in conflict-affected areas such as Kashmir, would allow policymakers to design more targeted interventions, for instance channeling infrastructure investment toward the specific unpaid-work burdens (water collection, animal husbandry, firewood gathering) that this study finds to be most time-intensive, rather than applying uniform national policy prescriptions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides a multidimensional understanding of women's unpaid family work in rural Kashmir, uncovering its economic, social, and psychological implications. The findings highlight how deeply gender norms shape household labor distribution, economic participation, and women's well-being. Across the surveyed localities Pulwama, Tral, Kulgam, Kupwara, and Budgam women remain the primary contributors to unpaid domestic work, including cooking, cleaning, childcare, and agricultural assistance. Despite being essential to family survival and community welfare, these activities remain largely invisible in both policy and economic accounting systems.

A key finding of this study is the persistence of gendered divisions of labor, where domestic work is considered a woman's responsibility irrespective of her involvement in paid employment. The majority of respondents confirmed that domestic duties occupy most of their day, leaving limited time for income-generating or educational activities. This imbalance reinforces a cycle of economic dependency and restricts opportunities for empowerment.

Interestingly, many women reported subjective satisfaction with their unpaid roles, deriving a sense of purpose and familial duty from their contributions. However, this emotional fulfillment coexists with structural inequality, unpaid work remains undervalued, unacknowledged, and unsupported. Women continue to experience time poverty, financial

insecurity, and social isolation, particularly in rural settings where infrastructural deficiencies and patriarchal expectations compound their challenges.

Education emerged as a critical enabling factor, strongly correlated with access to paid work and awareness of rights. Women with higher educational attainment demonstrated greater autonomy, decision-making power, and aspirations for economic independence. Nonetheless, barriers such as lack of childcare, mobility restrictions, and inadequate market access continue to limit their participation in formal employment.

The study reaffirms that unpaid care and domestic labor underpin both household welfare and the functioning of the broader economy. Without women's unpaid contributions, the paid economy could not operate efficiently. Yet, because this labor is excluded from GDP calculations and social protection policies, women's economic value remains systematically underestimated.

Women's unpaid work must be recognized not merely as a private household responsibility but as a public and economic issue requiring policy intervention. Recognition, redistribution, and reduction of unpaid labor through education, infrastructure, and social support are essential for achieving gender equity. This study underscores the need for targeted interventions that address structural inequalities, promote shared domestic responsibilities, and integrate unpaid work into economic and policy frameworks.

By valuing women's invisible contributions, society can move toward a more inclusive model of development where both economic growth and gender justice reinforce each other.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage equitable distribution of domestic and caregiving tasks among family members through awareness programs, community dialogue, and educational curricula.
- Integrate unpaid care work into labor statistics, time-use surveys, and social protection frameworks. Policies should acknowledge its economic value and extend benefits such as pension or insurance coverage to women engaged in full-time domestic roles.
- Expand access to affordable education, vocational training, and digital literacy programs for rural women to enhance their employability and independence.
- Improve rural infrastructure transport, water supply, electricity, and market linkages to reduce the time burden of domestic work and facilitate women's participation in paid employment.
- Establish community childcare centers, eldercare programs, and women's cooperatives to alleviate the intensity of unpaid care responsibilities.
- Provide targeted financial programs, microcredit access, and entrepreneurship support for women facing financial instability, especially those in remote or marginalized communities.

- Formulate and implement gender-responsive budgeting and policies that explicitly address the unequal division of unpaid labor and promote women's inclusion in all sectors of the economy.
- Challenge patriarchal norms through sustained advocacy, media campaigns, and educational reforms that promote gender equality at both household and community levels.

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