



“Is Unpaid caring an adventure”: In context with the women caregivers during covid 19

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the evolution of the new role assigned to the woman. Taking care of the family and society is something which is always been respected in our Indian culture. It is expected by each one of the family member to respect and take care of the family. But when it comes to a woman, it is considered to be her sole responsibility to take care of various needs, requirements of the family and household. It is often termed as labour of love. A common belief is that the men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers. It is considered as her prime responsibility to look after home and family. Women of poorer section are the biggest sufferers. The load of caregiving is only on women's shoulders which leads to the lack of time to study, entertain themselves and socialize with their peers at the younger age. During the covid, pandemic, lockdown women took the major responsibility in taking care of her family. In this paper the issues women caregivers face at home with special reference to the pandemic times. The source of information would be secondary based on newspaper reports, news channel reports and articles during the pandemic time.

Keywords: Pandemic, gender biased, equality, caregivers.

Introduction

Caregivers are the people who offers constant assistance to the people who are in need of some help on a regular basis. They could be the old age people of the family or people afflicted by some kind of chronic health conditions or met with some tragic issues. Such kind of care could be given at home by family or by hiring any caregiver which could also be a long term process. Another way of seeking care is to avail in any institutional settings under the guidance of the expert professionals. Home care is generally given by family, relatives, friends etc. which is mostly unpaid. Unpaid care from family or friends, prove to be the strength of the suffering person in family which serves to be the long term care to the people at home. At times when the care is given to a person you love, gives a feeling of fulfilment and learning the true meaning of life for oneself and for others. But at the same time the offered care is a burden or a bound task than the caregiver loses interest. When it comes to the boundation of one particular gender it becomes all the more difficult. "Gender is often an ignored factor during health emergencies, even though women comprise 70% of the global healthcare workforce. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most effective policy responses will be those that account for how the crisis is experienced by women and girls." (Hersh, 2020) Apart from health and economy covid 19 has put a setback even to the societal norms and the daily routines of the people. The lifestyle has completely altered which was not the cup of tea for the common masses. The situation redefined the gender roles, where women are working and earning handsomely whereas it has deteriorated in the places with weaker economy of the family.

Care giving by some stereotyped is considered as the role of only a woman. It is considered just as the reproductive or domestic role in the society. And thus measured as the duty of the women to give her services which are neither recognised nor paid. There are evidences that prove women are giving much more time in the labour market as compared to the non-care givers and the economic reimbursement to them is much more lesser or either negligible as compared with the others. When the discretional time devoted by her is compared by the time she devotes for the services offered, is very well thought out for her collective development and wellbeing. The formal working hours are less in comparison to informal working hours, time and energy she devotes in her family and the society, which becomes much more demanding for women in particular.

The sole responsibility of caregiving falls on the shoulders of women which is again inappropriate on account of young girls and aspirational women. It leaves them with no time for schooling and education, social

participation, working to earn money and for other economic activities and ultimately no time to meet their own potentials of life. They learn to balance unpaid care work and the time bound paid employment as well. This imbalanced representation leads to the gender wage gaps which underestimate the women labour. To monitor such issues, the International Center for Research on Women has been working with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to reduce the burden of caregiving on women and to promote the hiring of women, retaining their positions and promote women's participation in the corporate world and public sectors according to their deserving positions. (Sarah Gammage, 2019)

Caregiving becomes a burden when it falls on middle-aged women, especially socio economic weaker section of society. With low standards of education, economic condition of the family and very few sources of support it becomes mandatory for the women to justify their social standards by giving her hours of labour in giving the care to the family. Such kind of unpaid care affects their employment, social life, finances and most importantly their health. It also affects the type of care given by the caretaker. If she is affected by some psychological and health issues like depression, anxiety, irritability, muscle pain, and potentially weakening long-lasting problems in the body and joints, she will not be able to justify her work of caregiving which is the most demanding job. Caregiving requires patience, for the people one is taking care of is having some physical challenges. And if the care giver herself is not emotionally sound she will not be able to justify the needs and requirements of the patient. The emotional challenges of the care giver and her health conditions must be witnessed regularly by giving them the appropriate space they require.

Considering the current pandemic scenario, the care work has drastically increased due to the closure of schools, offices, day cares etc. shifting the responsibility to the households and ultimately to a woman. The shift in the opportunity for gender roles should have been taken place instead as an opportunity rather. Women even before this pandemic worked for more than three times than men with unpaid domestic work. But the current scenario only added the burden and challenged them to meet their responsibilities efficiently. From being a tutor to the children because of home schooling to the maid servant and the care taker for home and people suffering from illness during pandemic. Women of different age groups have served to be a great help irrespective of their age. Women who worked in the health care industry and are on frontline have the burden of double caregiving. The demands of working for longer hours, the chances of getting infections are higher and meeting the family expectations at the same time is worth mentioning. At certain places of paid work the

protocol for pandemic when not taken seriously have faced the adverse effects too. Women caregivers at lower levels works out of the great need. They avail very few professional benefits, including sick leave, poor protection for themselves etc. The caregivers who provide care in others home as a maid servant for home or the care taker for child, or a patient or an elderly. They inspite of spending longer hours are not paid off well and are not given any necessary protection. They are anytime marred with the monthly wages and the salary cut is there without any prior information. “Unpaid care work is indispensable to the development of the economy and societies and is central to human well-being.” (Duragova, 2020)

In a research by Mekko Graphics, the total minutes and time spent in unpaid care work and paid care work is also given here. (Goldstein, June19, 2019)

	A	B	C	D	E
1		Unpaid Care Work	Paid Work	Total	% of Time Spent on Unpaid Work
2	Women	265	183	448	0.591517857
3	Men	83	322	405	0.204938272
4					

Women caregivers at home must learn something to ease out from the adventurous life where they don't even get time for themselves and for self-care. The practice of saying 'no' must be learnt by them and there is a need to learn to prioritize oneself is there, on the contrary women make everything else the priority such attitude needs an amendment which actually starts from themselves. They need to create a supportive daily routine where they can seek the help of the family members in doing the daily chores which will again reduce the burden of doing everything by themselves. Unpaid care is underrated in our society which requires a lot of skill and it is highly demanding, it often goes unnoticed but plays an important and vital role in the development and well-being of the family. Additionally, covid -19 burdened the women with the unpaid care to be given to the family. Here she is affected when she working along with taking care of the family, she is burdened with childcare, old age care, taking care of people at home infected with covid and at the same time managing her work effortlessly and relentlessly. Lock down, curfews and the lack of social security has fuelled up gender biasedness. And if at all the women of the family is infected with the virus and become ill the condition will become more pitiable and intricate. Young girls of 5 to 14 years of age spend time at household chores instead of giving time to their education and to the things they love and passionate about as compared to the boys of the same age. They would be busy having fun and achieving their dreams and do what they

actually wish to do. The paid work opportunities are limited to the girls of this age as they get very less time to devote for themselves to develop the skills at workplace, resulting into the limited employment opportunities. Therefore, the unpaid work is never acknowledged and the worth is determined by the one with higher income in the family which will obviously be a male member. Women become more susceptible and vulnerable to violence. According to an author of the article, “That requires promoting women to leadership roles. Women are skilled service providers, epidemiologists, caregivers, community leaders, and more. Above all, they are the best experts on their own lives and must be meaningfully engaged in all preparedness and response efforts. That means ensuring the participation of girls and women in all local, national, regional, and global task forces on COVID-19. Women must serve on local community councils and in legislative bodies where important decisions are made. At the international level, gender imbalances in global health leadership, where men hold 72% of the top positions, must urgently be addressed.” (Hersh, 2020)

The role of women as the caregiver is deeply rooted in the mindsets of people not only in India but whole through the world. The need is to shift the attitude and mindset of the people and their conventional way of thinking. The men working at home, doing household chores, cooking, washing is still considered as a societal taboo. The need to understand the fact that when a woman can work outside home shoulder to shoulder with men than why can't men work at home in the same way. When both the partners earning equal wages or may be more by the women at times than the workload at home needs to be shared and the social taboo of men working household chores need to be changed. Especially in the time of pandemic and lockdown situations where house help is also prohibited. The redistribution of work at home including childcare needs to be framed again. The need is also to acknowledge the role of unpaid caregiving for the functioning of society and family's economy. The progress of women will also remain slow if we did not rip to pieces such unfair culture of the society.

Conclusion: The need of the hour is to measure, understand, identify and recognise the services given by the women caregivers during covid-19 and non covid-19 times. Support the women for education and providing them with efficient health care facilities and reducing the burden from their shoulders. Monetary protection and economic protection which they deserve as individuals and for which they have the right also with the right to access that freedom for the services they

offer should be given. Promoting men's participation in the care giving job and equal distribution of work will nurture and foster the essential conditions for the development of any society. The unappalled effects of covid-19 on the unpaid care work is recognised by many and the undaunted aftermaths of the crisis and calamity had the disastrous effect on the society and women in particular. The distinctive urge is for equal gender system and to acknowledge the work women offer at home(unpaid), output of the efforts laid by them will also result in the economic wellbeing of the society. The work performed by the women at home during lockdown as home schooling, providing day care etc. is presumed to be performed by the mothers whether she is a working mother or a house wife. The responsibility on men's shoulder is comparatively less, infact the expectations to work at home is also meekest by the society. This has increased the work load especially for women who continue to work even during pandemic. The time is to create an egalitarian society by equal distribution of work at home, the unpaid labour by both the sexes. It can happen only if flexible work arrangements are done, a comprehensive care system needs to be developed which debars the line of gender inequality for work and care giving. There is an urgent need to defeminize the care giving roles. (Patil, 2018)

Unpaid care is a worldwide issue, it affects almost all the women irrespective of their education, class, standards of their community and the country of their origin. In spite of making efforts to equally divide the care work between both males and females by many countries the biggest load persists on the women's shoulders. Participation from the sides of companies and both the sexes to encourage a more equal distribution of care work at the family level to be built by making the schedules flexible where both the parents get the efficient time to meet the expectations. The provision of taking necessary leaves from the paid employment, to meet and make the caregiving services instrumental, which will help to promote a balanced work and personal caregiving life.

The gender biasedness must be gauged through the gender lens to encounter the unique situations in covid 19 pandemic which is yet to be fully covered. This will not only help to improve the situations and position of women but will also improve their quality of life, their health, their mental wellbeing. This is the time and the right opportunity when we can truly recognise, assess, the needs of a woman and can address them efficiently and effectively by bringing up the ground

breaking rules buoyant systems to bring the reformation and renaissance in the world of caregivers and stimulate gender equality. Caring of family and the needy is the most humble and hospitable agenda of humanity which needs to be the centre of any national agenda. Covid 19 crisis are yet to be fully covered, government here needs to plan the policies for care givers and the system needs an infrastructure, public services to meet the different care needs of the population. The expected outcomes can be achieved by rearranging the gender wage gaps, balancing work life irrespective of gender differences and protection of rights in both formal and informal sector. Thus it will create high spirited, strong, irrepressible, gender responsive egalitarian society.

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