



WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

PAKISTAN

UNPAID CARE WORK & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

At Lower Dir KP

By: Development Empowerment Women Association (DEWA)

SYNOPSIS

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Unpaid Care Work and Women Empowerment at Lower Dir KP

Unpaid care work, predominantly undertaken by women and girls, encompasses the essential but often undervalued tasks that sustain the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. These tasks range from domestic chores to caregiving for family members, childcare, healthcare, and emotional support. Within formal economy, this work remains largely unrecognized, further perpetuating social norms and cultural traditions, confining women and girls

to domestic duties, and limiting their potential. This knowledge product delves into the complex and multi-dimensional constraints faced by women in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It seeks to raise awareness about unpaid care work and its societal implications, identify areas requiring improvement in redistributing women's workloads within the market economy and provide insights for development practitioners and policymakers.

Scope of Work and Methodology:

- This knowledge product is driven by a fundamental question: How do deeply ingrained social norms, existing power dynamics, and institutional structures shape and, at times, constrain the practices of unpaid care work, consequently limiting the rights and economic opportunities of women?
- By exploring how social norms perpetuate disparities and the extent to which institutional frameworks and power imbalances reinforce these norms, this knowledge product aspires to contribute nuanced insights that can inform targeted policy interventions and initiatives. It encompasses the area of Lower Dir in KP region, a predominantly Pakhtun/ Pushtun (Pashto speaking natives) region.
- To build a comprehensive picture, Key Individual Interviews (KIIs) were done using a detailed questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted, with female professionals, home based workers, entrepreneurs, and government officials. The data collected analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including statistical analysis software (SPSS).
- A sample of 200 respondents was taken where 75% of the sampled respondents identified as female and 25% as male.

Key Findings – Quantitative:

90% respondents agreed that societal factors contribute to unequal distribution of unpaid care work among females.

89% respondents agreed that unpaid care work impacts the ability of females to participate in paid employment or pursue education.

63.5% recognized that social norms related to gender roles significantly influence unpaid care work practices, limiting women's rights and economic opportunities.

70.5% acknowledged that power imbalances within households contribute to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, consequently restricting women's economic opportunities and rights.

53.5% respondents agreed that societal factors contribute to unequal distribution of unpaid care work among females.

66.5% respondents agreed that unpaid care work impacts the ability of females to participate in paid employment or pursue education.

80.5% recognized that social norms related to gender roles significantly influence unpaid care work practices, limiting women's rights and economic opportunities.

69% acknowledged that power imbalances within households contribute to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, consequently restricting women's economic opportunities and rights.

Key Findings – Qualitative:

- During the interviews and FGDs, the participants identified that **prevalence of stereotypical beliefs**, and social stigma resultantly leads to their limited involvement in household chores. The participants also agreed that **education attainment, family support in decision making, and equal economic opportunities** can help empower women. Most respondents were largely unaware of **government programs** and initiatives for women aimed that their economic and societal inclusion, inheritance rights and other pro-women laws.
- It was stressed that institution heads should provide conducive environment to women employees, and that majority of these heads are **unaware of existing policies and pro-women legislation**. This lack of awareness may contribute to inadequate implementation. Respondents employed in the private sector spoke about job insecurity, lack of facilities and proper channels for complaints.
- In terms of care work, all respondents articulated that **cultural or societal factors contribute to unequal distribution** of care work in Pakhtun society, and that unpaid care work impacts ability of females to participate in paid employment or pursue education. Most respondents agreed that the gendered division of labour within the household **deteriorates mental and physical wellbeing of women**.

“The prevailed cultural norms are not changeable and if someone wants to make such changes then they will face societal Pighore (social stigma) or repercussions”

Female FGD Participant

“There is a lack of check and balance at institutional structure which addresses the unpaid care work”

Female FGD Participant

“We want to help our wives but fear from Pighoor which prevailed since the dawn of Pushtun culture. If fear from Pighoor were eroded through awareness and religious doctrine then we will work openly at household chores with our partner”

Male FGD Participant

Recommendations in Light of Individual Interviewed

Promoting Gender-Equal Division of Unpaid Care Work:

- Develop and implement community-based awareness campaigns that actively involve male family members in household chores and unpaid care work. Challenge the perception that caregiving is exclusively a woman's task and counteract social stigma.
- Encourage open discussions within households and communities to challenge traditional gender roles and the division of labor. Emphasize the importance of shared responsibilities in caregiving.

Institutional Support and Policy Changes:

- Advocate for government policies and labor laws that recognize the significance of unpaid care work and its impact on women's rights and economic opportunities. This should include provisions for parental leave and affordable childcare options.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing government programs aimed at supporting women in managing unpaid care work and enhancing their economic opportunities in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Ensure these programs are adequately funded and accessible to women.

Enhancing Educational Attainment:

- Promote educational attainment among women to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed for economic empowerment. This includes encouraging girls' education and providing scholarships and incentives for continued learning.

Family Support and Decision-Making:

- Encourage family support in decision-making processes, particularly in matters related to women's education and employment. Foster an environment where women's voices are heard and respected within the family.

Economic Opportunities and Women's Rights:

- Create opportunities for women to engage in business activities and gain economic independence. This can be achieved through skill development programs, entrepreneurship support, and improved access to financial resources.
- Advocate for women's rights and equal opportunities in all sectors, ensuring that women have access to healthcare, education, and the ability to exercise their right to vote.

Raising Awareness:

- Conduct awareness programs and seminars at the community level, organized by both government and civil society, to sensitize society about the value and significance of unpaid care work performed by females in household settings.

- Utilize various media platforms, including print, social, and electronic media, to disseminate information about unpaid care work and its importance. Promote gender equality and challenge traditional norms through these channels.
- Incorporate unpaid care work awareness into educational curricula and religious teachings to instill the value of gender-equal caregiving from an early age.

Community Involvement and Poverty Alleviation:

- Engage communities in discussions and workshops to sensitize them about the impact of unpaid care work on women's lives. Mobilize community members to support a gender-equal division of labor.
- Address poverty-related factors that influence unpaid care work. Implement poverty alleviation programs that can help alleviate some of the economic burdens on women and households.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the discussion with key stakeholders, some policy recommendations were also forwarded as part of the detailed report. Part of these recommendations are listed below:

- A forum of discussions with the partners, fathers, brothers, and religious *Mullah's* (clergy) with the sole aim to sensitize the value and worth of unpaid women.
- Propagation of women rights in the purview of Islamic teaching if disseminated by the *Mullah's* through different *Khutba's*.
- The government should make such policies pertaining to unpaid care work which worsen the physical and psychological wellbeing of female day by day due to the unpaid care work.
- There should be a childcare arrangement for working women in workplace to encourage their paid employment.
- There is need of community education through recognized social institutions to ensure that the burden of care services and unpaid work tasks are shared more equitably between women and men, government, the private sector, communities and households.
- Access to legal systems needs particular strengthening to protect and support women increasingly vulnerable to intimate partner violence.
- Maternity leave public subsidies of 14 weeks (ILO standard) improve women's likelihood of taking leave instead of leaving the labour force entirely.

- Equal amounts of maternity and paternity leave increase women's employment by increasing employer incentives to hire woman.
- Transformative change for women requires policy that recognises, reduces, and redistributes unpaid care work. Government incentives can support this change, such as through "cash for care" subsidies to compensate parents affected by school and daycare closures and for employers that provide workers with paid leave.

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