

Study finds rural women in five countries spend more time than men caring for others

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Credit: Julius Ceaser Kasujla/Oxfam

In a study of rural communities in five countries, researchers found that women provide far more hours caring for others in their daily lives than do their male counterparts. Leyla Karimli, assistant professor of social

welfare at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, is lead author of the new report published by the UK-based international organization Oxfam.

"Care work is essential for personal well-being and for maintaining societies," stated Karimli and her co-authors. "But across the world, it is overwhelmingly the preserve of women, and it often restricts their opportunities for education, employment, politics and leisure."

In gathering data for the study, "Factors and Norms Influencing Unpaid Care Work," a number of teams interviewed more than 1,000 households in [rural communities](#) in five countries—Colombia, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The researchers used the Household Care Survey to analyze change that may have occurred in households participating in We-Care (Women's Economic Empowerment and Care) programs over the year, part of Oxfam's global policy and advocacy work on unpaid care work and women's empowerment. Karimli also was part of the team that developed the survey.

From looking after children and dependent adults to preparing meals and ensuring that food, water and household necessities are available to their families, care can be defined in a multitude of ways.

Recognizing that the "heavy" and "unequal" distribution of care work is a human rights issue, the survey focused on a number of "levers of change" at the household level, including factors such as the recognition of the importance of care work and women's role in carrying it out; women's ability to make decisions in the household; and access to time/labor-saving equipment. Researchers examined the extent to which these and other factors were associated with the amount of time women and men spent on unpaid care work, and the distribution of that care

within the household.

Based on the survey, the researchers found:

- On average, women spent 5.4 hours on care as a primary activity during the day, compared to just under an hour (0.99) for men.
- When care as a secondary activity was included, women spent an average of 7.0 hours on care, compared to 1.4 hours for men.
- Over one-third of all men in the sample reported spending no time on any care activity.
- On average, 78 percent of women had been responsible for a child, compared to 48 percent of men, and 11 percent of women had been responsible for a dependent adult compared to 9 percent of men.
- Women reported an average of 13.8 hours of their previous day was devoted to at least one care responsibility, including supervision, compared to the 4.3 hours that men reported having any care responsibility.
- On average, women spent 6.1 hours on multitasking, compared to 1.2 hours for men.

Women also spent relatively more time on total paid and unpaid work—9.1 hours compared to 7.3 hours for men—while spending less time on leisure and personal care.

The authors added that when supervision is taken into account, the average number of hours that women reported having some care responsibility rises by 250 percent, from an average of 5.4 hours a day of care work as a primary activity to 13.8 hours per day that women have any care responsibility. In addition, the amount of time that women spend relative to men in these predominantly rural, developing country contexts is much greater than the global figures suggest.

The analysis also considered the relationship between the amount of care work in which women engaged and their education, relative household assets, income and savings, as well as household access to time-saving equipment such as water taps and fuel-efficient stoves. None of these factors was consistently associated with the amount of care work provided by women.

For example, the authors pointed out, "Although some equipment and service access—notably the provision of electricity—seemed to have a positive effect on women's care loads, our results also make clear that a focus on only one dimension of care, such as child care provision or stoves or water systems, cannot be expected to significantly 'free up' these rural women's time." However, the authors reported that the data did suggest some evidence that in households where "social norms were more progressive," care work was more evenly distributed.

Overall, the researchers said, the aim of the study is to "generate evidence that helps local organizations address problematic aspects of care work, contributing to [women](#)'s ability to participate, lead and benefit from development initiatives."

More information: The full report is available online: [policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/p ... idence-from-f-620145](https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/policy-practice/identifying-evidence-from-f-620145)

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