



VALUING UNPAID WORK IN THE HOME

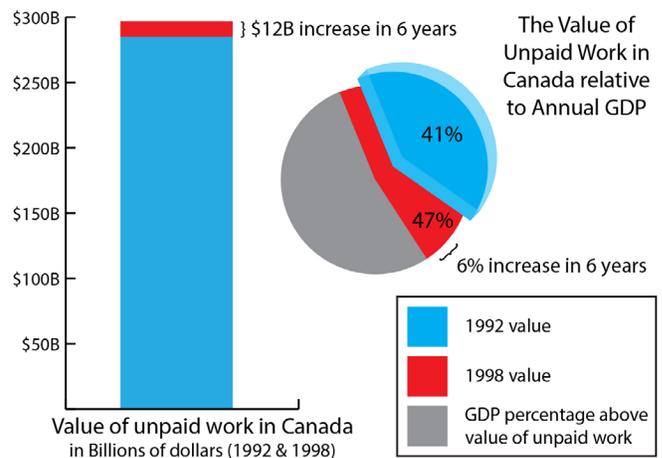
Unpaid work in the home includes all the activities people do to look after each other and manage their households. This domestic labour involves caregiving—looking after children, other family and household members, dependent adults, and frail seniors—and house work, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, yard work, maintenance, and shopping. Because it is unpaid and involves private households, it is not officially recognized as “work”. Feminists have demanded that governments measure and value unpaid domestic labour, and provide supports for those who do it.

Why does unpaid work in the home matter to women?

Women are still the main providers of unpaid housework and care giving. Women with young children spend more than twice as much time as men providing child care and are more likely to provide care for dependent adults and frail seniors. Women also spend 1.5 times more time than men on housework. Women’s unpaid care work is essential, not only to their households, but to the well-being of the population.

Unpaid domestic labour affects women’s economic security. Some women remain out of the labour force to be at home, while others move in and out of the labour force to accommodate care work. Most take jobs that minimize conflicts with responsibilities at home, seeking work close to home or near their children’s schools, avoiding long hours or travel, and working part-time. As a result, women on average earn less than men, have smaller pensions, and do not get the kinds of supports available to other workers, such as Employment Insurance and other benefits. Women are more likely to be at risk of poverty, especially when they are single parents, when their children are young, or when they are elderly.

Women’s unpaid domestic labour affects the Canadian economy. From the perspective of employers, the loss of women (and men) who leave the labour force to be at home is problematic. From the perspective of governments, women’s involvement in the paid labour force means they are less available to provide free care and, as a result,



there is greater pressure on social services. The United Nations has declared that, as women are no longer available in the home in most countries, there is a “care crisis” and it has urged member countries to improve care provisions for recipients and providers.

Despite significant contributions to the economy and society, unpaid domestic labour is largely ignored by legislators and policy makers. In 1992, under pressure from feminists, Statistics Canada assessed the value of unpaid household work at \$285 billion, equal to 41 percent of the GDP and 60 percent of personal disposable income. By 1998 its value had reached \$297 billion. In 1995, the United Nations reported that internationally the monetary value of unpaid domestic labour was \$16 trillion, \$11 trillion of that amount produced by women. Regrettably, Statistics Canada and the United Nations have not updated their information on the contribution of unpaid domestic labour to the economy since the 1990s. It is still undervalued and undercounted.



What can governments do?

Canadian governments can recognize and value unpaid domestic labour by:

- Making women's work count! The federal government can collect more and on-going data on unpaid work, make this data available, and show its importance to the economy and society as a whole by emphasizing unpaid work in policy making.
- Honouring Canada's international obligations to promote women's human rights by improving conditions for those providing unpaid work.
- Examining how unpaid work affects income, spending habits, debt levels, and investment choices across groups in society (based on factors such as race, class, age, gender, and region) and by conducting gender-based analyses* to show how government policies help or harm those who provide unpaid domestic labour.
- Investing in infrastructure and working together to develop and fund public services that support care givers, especially child care, home care, and long-term care programs.
- Providing tax deductions or tax credits that recognize unpaid work contributions.
- Allowing unpaid workers to contribute to, and benefit from, federal employment-based programs such as the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, and parental leaves.
- Stimulating market developments that support unpaid work like lowering indirect taxes on the consumption of goods and services, such as the Value Added Tax on laundries and cleaning services.

What is Gender-based Analysis?

*Gender-based analysis is an analytical tool used to assess the potential impact of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys, taking into account gender and other factors, such as age, education, language, geography, culture and income. (Definition from Status of Women Canada)

Governments can develop workplace policies that accommodate workers' unpaid responsibilities:

- Well-paid parental leaves and paid compassionate leaves for all workers.
- Paternity and other caregiving leaves to encourage more equal sharing between women and men and to create a culture of support for men who do caregiving.
- Reduced working hours, flexible hours, and paid leaves to facilitate unpaid work.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - *Making Women Count*
www.policyalternatives.ca

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
www.criaw-icref.ca

Gender and Work Database
www.genderwork.ca/gwd/

Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences
www.ideas-idees.ca/blog/
engendering-changes-unpaid-work-canada

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
www.oecd.org/canada/

Statistics Canada - *Unpaid Work*
www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11546-eng.htm
www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm

Resources

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