



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK IN AFGHANISTAN

Insights from the Afghanistan Time Use Survey

Global Trends

Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their being female. The COVID-19 crisis has made visible the fact that the world's economies and the maintenance of our daily lives are built on the invisible and unpaid labor of women and girls. With children out of school, intensified care needs of older persons and ill family members, and overwhelmed health services, demands for women and girls unpaid care and domestic work in a COVID-19 world have grown exponentially.

Globally, there are gross imbalances in the gender distribution of unpaid care work. Before COVID-19 became a pandemic, women were doing three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. As formal and informal supply of schooling and childcare declines with COVID-19, the demand for unpaid childcare falls even more heavily on women, not only because of the existing structure of the workforce, but also because of social norms. This limits women's ability to work, particularly when jobs cannot be carried out remotely. Where remote work is possible, stress and multitasking will take a disproportionate toll on women's health and well-being.

Non-COVID-19 related health and social services have been scaled back across the world, meaning that families

need to provide greater support to members who suffer other illnesses, including chronic ones. Women are at the forefront of the COVID-19 response as the default unpaid family caregivers. The unpaid and invisible labor of women and girls has been exacerbated exponentially by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has revealed the way in which the daily functioning of families, communities, and the formal economy are dependent on this invisible work of women and girls.¹



Globally, women on average spend

4.1 hours/day

on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to

1.7 hours/day

for men

¹<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>

The Afghanistan Time Use Survey

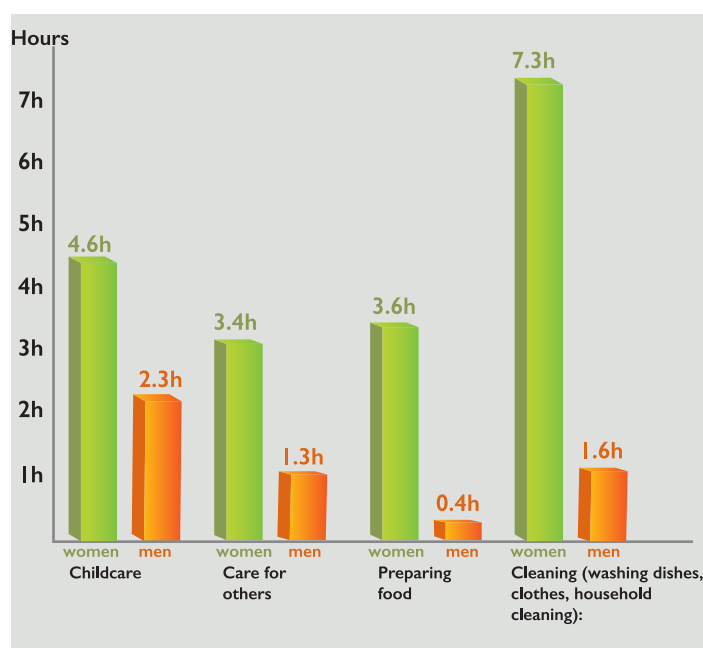
A Time Use Survey measures the average number of hours per day people spend on certain activities and quantifies the contribution of unpaid work of both men and women.

UN Women partnered with Afghans for Afghanistan's Development (AFAD) Organization to undertake the Afghanistan Time Use Survey. The research was conducted in Nangarhar, Kabul, Takhar, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, and Paktia provinces. This is the first Time Use Survey conducted in Afghanistan. The objective of the survey was to measure the amount of average time men and women spend on various activities within a 24-hour timeframe. The data was collected through a questionnaire and a diary, to calculate the amount of time spent on a range of activities. Data was collected during the first quarter of 2019, during winter/spring. 4,400 respondents were surveyed, all over 18 years of age.

The distribution of survey respondents by urban and rural areas was roughly equal. The survey included more women respondents, 62%, than men, 38%. The higher number of women respondents helped ensure information on women's time-use patterns was sufficient. The percentage of married respondents was 66%, unmarried at 31%, and others (widow or separated), 3%. The percentage of respondents with some level of education was 62% and with no formal education 38%.

Time Use Survey findings on unpaid care and domestic work²

The Time Use Survey revealed the following findings, related to unpaid care and domestic work in Afghanistan (note, some activities take place concurrently):

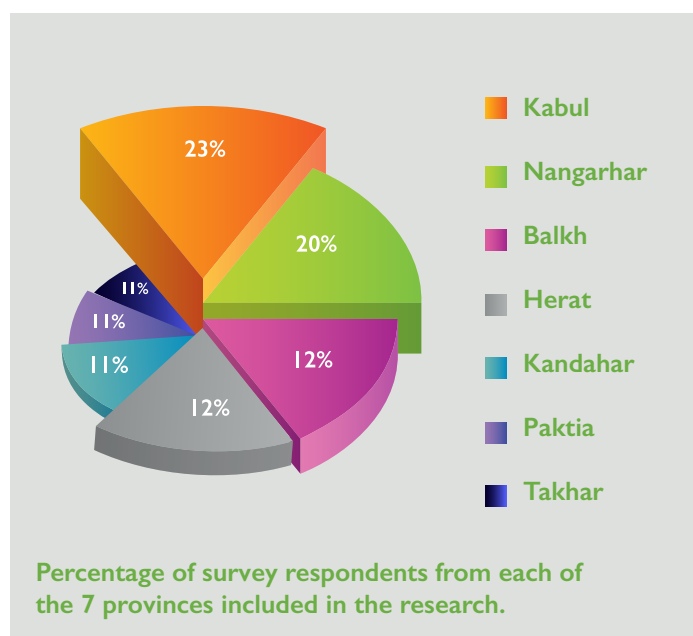


Total cumulative time spent on childcare, care for others, preparing food, & cleaning:
Women, 18.7 hrs; Men 5.6 hrs.

The potential impact of COVID-19 on unpaid care and domestic work in Afghanistan

The Time Use Survey showed a dramatic gap between the contributions of women and men to unpaid care and domestic work in Afghanistan. This gap will only have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent lockdown across the nation, and the resulting increased burden of care with health and social services disrupted, schools and childcare facilities closed. Stigma associated with seeking health assistance for potential COVID-19 cases will create further demands on women's time, if people stay home while they are suffering from the virus and are cared for within their households.

Beyond the immediate crisis in unpaid care and domestic work, it is possible that there may be some residual impact on social norms that could contribute to greater equality.³ The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and domestic work, gives families and households an opportunity to reconsider sharing of the burden of care, for the benefit of women, men, families, communities and ultimately, to create a more gender equal Afghanistan.



Percentage of survey respondents from each of the 7 provinces included in the research.

²Note that data was collected for individual, not cumulative activities. These figures represent the summation of time spent on individual activities, which may not all occur in one household on one day, or which may be undertaken by more than one woman in a household.

³<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>