

TIME POVERTY IN INDIA: INSIGHTS FROM A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE ON TIME USE SURVEYS

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ABSTRACT

One of the latest aspects among the various aspects of deprivation related to poverty and inequality is 'Time Poverty'. It is defined as the chronic lack of discretionary time due to extensive unpaid and paid work hours, disproportionately affecting women. This paper examines the intricate link between time poverty and gender inequality in India, utilizing data from the 'Time Use Survey 2019' (TUS) conducted by the NSO, which states that Indian women spend nearly five hours daily on unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks, while men spend only 97 minutes. This disparity significantly limits women's participation in paid employment, social, and political activities. The paper highlights the 'double shift' phenomenon where women juggle professional responsibilities and domestic chores, exacerbating time poverty and hindering economic advancement. Historical data from the 1998 Time Use Survey provides a comparative analysis, revealing persistent gender disparities over two decades. The study emphasizes that while there have been marginal improvements, significant gender gaps remain in the allocation of both paid and unpaid work. It underscores the need for targeted policy interventions such as flexible work arrangements, increased public investment in childcare services, and societal shifts in gender norms. By addressing these issues, India can advance towards gender equality and enhance the overall well-being of its citizens. The paper advocates for continued research and data collection to track progress and inform effective policy-making, ultimately aiming for an inclusive environment where both men and women can thrive, contributing to a balanced and prosperous society.

Keywords: Time Poverty, Gender, Equality, Women, Unpaid Domestic Work, Rural, Urban.

INTRODUCTION

'Time Poverty', a concept increasingly recognized within global development discourse, refers to the chronic lack of time to engage in rest and leisure activities due to the extensive hours spent on work, both paid and unpaid. This phenomenon is intricately linked to gender inequality, as women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid labor. Globally, women spend significantly more time on

unpaid care work compared to men. In India, these issues are particularly pronounced, reflecting deeply entrenched societal norms and economic structures. The 2019 Time Use Survey illuminates this disparity, revealing that Indian women spend almost five hours a day on unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks, while men spend merely 97 minutes on similar activities. This imbalance is a stark indicator of time poverty, which severely limits women's ability to participate in paid employment, engage in social and

political activities, or simply enjoy personal leisure time.

Historically, Indian society has adhered to rigid gender roles, with men primarily responsible for earning income and women managing household duties without financial compensation. Despite advancements and increased female participation in the workforce, these traditional roles persist. Women continue to perform the bulk of unpaid work, contributing to a 'double shift' phenomenon where they manage both professional responsibilities and domestic chores. This dual burden exacerbates time poverty, leaving women with minimal discretionary time for personal development or self-care. Time poverty is not merely a symptom of economic inequality but also a significant contributor to it. Women's extensive engagement in unpaid labor restricts their opportunities for paid employment and career advancement. When women do enter the workforce, they often occupy part-time or informal sector jobs that offer little security or benefits, further entrenching economic disparities. The cyclical nature of time poverty and economic inequality means that women are continuously disadvantaged, both in terms of income and quality of life.

This article draws on insights from India's Time Use Surveys (TUS) to explore the intersection of time poverty and gender inequality, highlighting how these dynamics perpetuate women's marginalization. TUS serves as a vital tool in measuring how individuals allocate their time across various activities, offering detailed insights into the gendered nature of time use. By capturing data on both paid and unpaid activities, TUS provides a comprehensive understanding of the time constraints faced by different demographics. By understanding and addressing this issue, India can make significant strides toward achieving gender equality and improving the overall well-being of its citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Yana Van der Meulen Rodgers (2024) provides a comprehensive examination of the concept of time poverty, highlighting its gendered nature and proposing policy solutions to address this critical issue. Time poverty refers to insufficient time for rest and leisure after accounting for work. It intersects with income poverty, limiting economic productivity and well-being. The paper highlights significant implications for women's economic opportunities and well-being, as it restricts labor market participation and leads to lower income and economic dependency. It also affects health due to delayed healthcare and increased stress. This creates a vicious cycle, especially for low-income workers who need multiple jobs to support their families.

Navdeep Singh and Sangeeta Nagaich (2023) synthesize literature from various studies on time poverty, underscoring the persistent gender disparities in time allocation. They highlight how women globally bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid work, leading to significant time poverty. Time poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by factors such as gender norms, economic status, and societal expectations. The study also discusses the methodological approaches used in different studies to measure time poverty, including time-use surveys and qualitative interviews, and suggests integrating it into broader poverty alleviation strategies, proposing flexible work arrangements, public investment in childcare, and promoting gender equality in household responsibilities.

The study by **Sarah Eissler et al. (2022)** examines time-use agency, emphasizing strategic time allocation choices influenced by gendered power dynamics and local norms. Data from Benin, Malawi, and Nigeria, reveal that men generally have more control over their time, while women face constraints from societal expectations and household responsibilities. The study also finds that time-use agency is closely tied to other dimensions of agency beyond decision-making, such as the ability to exert influence within the household. The authors propose understanding and measuring time-use agency to gain deeper insights into

empowerment processes and design better support policies.

The paper by **Elizabeth Hyde, Margaret E. Greene, and Gary L. Darmstadt (2020)** provides an in-depth analysis of the pervasive issue of time poverty and its multifaceted impact on women's lives globally, especially on their health and economic opportunities. It also discusses its broader implications for gender inequality. Women and girls disproportionately bear unpaid domestic work, limiting their time for education, paid employment, self-care, and public life. This inequitable distribution hampers economic opportunities and poses health risks due to self-neglect and stress. The paper argues that addressing time poverty is crucial for achieving gender equality and sustainable development, urging for policy changes that recognize and redistribute unpaid work, promote gender equality in paid employment, and support women's health and economic empowerment.

Liangshu Qi and Xiao-yuan Dong (2018) analyze time poverty among urban workers in China, highlighting greater time deficits for women. Women face longer working hours due to unpaid care work in addition to paid employment. Using three measures to quantify time poverty, the study finds women and low-paid workers are more likely to be time-poor. Furthermore, regression analysis indicates that female workers, those with lower wages, and those with caregiving responsibilities are at higher risk. The authors also simulate policy scenarios, showing that enforcing higher minimum wage standards and stricter working time regulations can mitigate time poverty, especially among women.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the distribution of paid and unpaid work among men and women in rural and urban areas of India.
- To examine the types and distribution of unpaid work performed by women and the sharing of household work for gender equity.

- To analyze the gender distribution of these household tasks to understand the burden of unpaid work on women.
- To make a comparative study of 1998 and 2019 Time Use Surveys to understand the time use trends and patterns.
- To recommend policies that promote gender equity in both paid and unpaid work, such as flexible work arrangements and childcare support.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

We drew the data used in this study from the 'Time Use Survey'-2019. The 'Time Use Survey' (TUS) is the first survey of its kind conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) during the period from January 2019 to December 2019. This survey was spread over 9,945 First Stage Units (5,947 villages and 3,998 urban blocks) and covered 1,38,799 households (82,897 rural and 55,902 urban). Information on time use was collected from each member of age 6 years and above of the selected households and a total of 4,47,250 persons of age 6 years and above (2,73,195 rural and 1,74,055 urban) were surveyed. The survey covered the whole of the Indian Union except the villages in Andaman and Nicobar Islands which are difficult to access. Data on time use was collected through the personal interview method and the information covered a period of 24 hours starting from 4:00 A.M. on the day before the date of interview to 4:00 A.M. on the day of interview. To do a comparative analysis and understand the trends and patterns of time use between 1998 and 2019, we also used the data from a pilot 'Time Use Survey' conducted by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) in 1998-99. This survey covered 18,628 households (12,792 rural and 5,856 urban) and 77,593 people spread over six selected states, namely, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, and Meghalaya during the period July 1998 to June 1999.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Insights from the 2019 Time Use Survey: Paid and Unpaid Work, Time Poverty, and Gender Disparity

The Time Use Survey (TUS) conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) in India during January-December 2019 provides a comprehensive

overview of how individuals aged 6 years and above allocate their time across various activities. This survey offers unique insights into the distribution of time spent on paid and unpaid activities, revealing significant trends related to gender and urban-rural disparities.

Table No. – 1: Percentage of Persons of Age 6 Years and Above Participating in Different Activities in a Day (All-India)

Description of the Activity	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
Employment and related activities	56.1	19.2	37.9	59.8	16.7	38.9	57.3	18.4	38.2
Production of goods for own final use	19.1	25.0	22.0	3.4	8.3	5.8	14.3	20.0	17.1
Unpaid domestic services for household members	27.7	82.1	54.6	22.6	79.2	50.1	26.1	81.2	53.2
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	14.4	28.2	21.2	13.2	26.3	19.5	14.0	27.6	20.7
Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work	2.8	2.0	2.4	2.5	2.2	2.3	2.7	2.0	2.4
Learning	24.1	19.4	21.8	23.3	20.7	22.0	23.9	19.8	21.9
Socializing and communication, community participation and religious practice	91.7	91.2	91.5	90.6	91.4	91.0	91.4	91.3	91.3
Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices	87.0	82.2	84.6	92.1	92.7	92.4	88.5	85.3	86.9
Self-care and maintenance	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Time use Survey- 2019.

Note: The estimates have been calculated considering all the activities in a time slot.

Table No. - 2: Average Time (in minutes) Spent in a Day Per Participant of Age 6 Years and Above in Different Activities (All-India)

Description of the Activity	Rural			Urban			Rural+Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
Employment and related activities	434	317	404	514	375	485	459	333	429
Production of goods for own final use	203	123	158	134	64	85	198	116	151
Unpaid domestic services for household members	98	301	249	94	293	247	97	299	248
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	77	132	113	75	138	116	76	134	114
Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work	99	98	98	111	101	106	102	99	101
Learning	422	422	422	435	425	430	426	423	424
Socializing and communication, community participation and religious practice	151	139	145	138	138	138	147	139	143
Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices	162	157	159	171	181	176	164	165	165
Self-care and maintenance	737	724	731	711	720	715	729	723	726

Source: Time use Survey- 2019.

Note: The estimates have been calculated considering all the activities in a time slot.

One of the most striking trends, that can be clearly seen in Table – 1 and Table - 2, is the gender disparity in participation in employment and related activities. The data shows that in rural areas, 56.1% of males are engaged in employment compared to only 19.2% of females. This gap is similarly evident in urban areas, where 59.8% of males participate in employment activities compared to 16.7% of females. On average, males in rural areas spend 434 minutes per day on employment, while their female counterparts spend 317 minutes. In urban settings,

males dedicate 514 minutes daily to employment, whereas females spend 375 minutes. This trend indicates that men are not only more likely to be employed but also spend significantly more time on employment activities than women. The overall participation rate in employment is 57.3% for males and 18.4% for females, with males averaging 459 minutes and females 333 minutes per day.

In contrast, unpaid domestic services for household members exhibit a reverse trend, with a higher participation rate among females. In rural

areas, 82.1% of females engage in unpaid domestic services, compared to 27.7% of males. Urban areas reflect a similar pattern, with 79.2% of females and 22.6% of males participating. On average, rural females spend 301 minutes per day on these activities, significantly more than the 98 minutes spent by rural males. In urban areas, females allocate 293 minutes daily to unpaid domestic services, compared to 94 minutes for males. This disparity highlights the significant burden of domestic responsibilities borne by women, limiting their availability for paid employment.

The data also reveals interesting insights into the allocation of time to socializing and communication, community participation, and religious practices. Participation in these activities is high across all demographics, with 91.7% of rural males and 91.2% of rural females engaging in such activities. Urban participation rates are similarly high, with 90.6% of males and 91.4% of females. The overall participation rate stands at 91.3%, indicating that social and community engagement is a significant part of daily life for most individuals, regardless of gender or location. Time spent on these activities averages 151 minutes for rural males and 139 minutes for rural females. Urban males spend 138 minutes, while urban females also spend 138 minutes on these activities.

Learning activities show consistent participation and time allocation across genders and regions. Both rural and urban males and females spend approximately 422-426 minutes per day on

learning activities. This consistency suggests a relatively uniform emphasis on education and skill development across different segments of the population. The high time allocation to learning reflects the importance placed on education in both rural and urban settings, despite differences in resources and access to educational facilities.

A detailed look at the percentage share of total time spent on different activities further underscores the gender and urban-rural disparities. Employment and related activities account for 16.9% of rural males' time and 4.2% of rural females' time. In urban areas, these activities take up 21.3% of males' time and 4.3% of females' time. Overall, males allocate 18.3% of their time to employment, compared to 4.2% for females. Unpaid domestic services consume 17.2% of rural females' time and 1.9% of rural males' time. In urban settings, these services take up 16.1% of females' time and 1.5% of males' time, indicating a significant gender disparity in domestic responsibilities. Self-care and maintenance activities account for the largest share of time, with both males and females across rural and urban areas dedicating approximately 50-51% of their day to these activities.

TWO DECADES APART: INSIGHTS FROM A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 1998 AND 2019 TIME USE SURVEYS

Table No. – 3: Weekly Average Time Spent (in hours) on SNA, Extended SNA and Non-SNA Activities by Sex and Place of Residence

Activities		Male	Female	Total	Rural (Male)	Rural (Female)	Rural (Total)	Urban (Male)	Urban (Female)	Urban (Total)
SNA	1998	41.96	18.72	30.75	42.31	22.53	32.72	41.06	9.16	25.77
	2019	31.38	9.33	20.65	30.57	10.15	20.53	33.60	7.35	20.88
Ext. SNA	1998	3.65	34.63	18.69	3.74	33.95	18.04	3.44	36.44	19.26
	2019	4.43	32.78	18.32	4.67	33.37	18.78	3.85	31.50	17.27
Non-SNA	1998	122.42	114.58	118.62	121.98	111.5	116.89	123.47	122.44	123.03
	2019	132.18	125.88	129.03	132.88	124.48	128.68	130.55	129.15	129.85
Total	1998	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00
	2019	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00	168.00

Sources: Time use Survey- 1998 and 2019.

The SNA (System of National Accounts) activities consist of primary production activities like crop farming, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, processing and storage, mining and quarrying; secondary activities like construction, manufacturing etc.; and activities like trade, business and services. Extended SNA activities include household maintenance and care for children, the sick, and the elderly. The activities related to learning, social and cultural activities, mass media, and personal care, and self-maintenance are categorized as non-SNA activities.

From 1998 to 2019, there were significant shifts in how individuals allocated their time, with notable gender disparities and variations between rural and urban areas (Table – 3). In 1998, males dedicated an average of 41.96 hours per week to SNA activities, while females spent only 18.72 hours on these activities, highlighting a gender disparity of 23.24 hours. By 2019, this disparity widened slightly to 22.05 hours with males spending 31.38 hours and females only 9.33 hours on SNA activities. This trend suggests that while both genders reduced their participation in SNA activities, the reduction was more pronounced among females likely due to technological advancements and shifts in occupational roles, reducing the need for manual labor traditionally associated with SNA activities.

Extended SNA activities, which include household maintenance and caregiving, showed persistent gender disparities. In 1998, females spent an average of 34.63 hours per week on extended SNA activities, significantly more than the 3.65 hours spent by males, resulting in a disparity of 30.98 hours. By 2019, this disparity slightly decreased to 28.35 hours, with females allocating 32.78 hours and males 4.43 hours to extended SNA activities. This indicates a marginal improvement but still underscores the substantial unpaid work burden carried by females. Factors such as increased female participation in the workforce and evolving gender roles might have contributed to this slight reduction, though the burden remains significantly skewed.

Non-SNA activities, encompassing learning, social and cultural activities, and personal care, also exhibited gender differences. In 1998, males spent 122.42 hours per week on these activities, compared to 114.58 hours by females, with a disparity of 7.84 hours. By 2019, this gap narrowed to 6.3 hours, with males increasing their time to 132.18 hours and females to 125.88 hours. The increase in non-SNA activity time for both genders suggests an improvement in the availability of discretionary time, possibly driven by higher educational attainment and a greater emphasis on personal well-being, though females still lag behind males.

Rural and urban differences further illustrate the complexities of time use. Indicating by Time Use Survey -1998, in rural areas, males and females spent 42.31 hours and 22.53 hours, respectively on SNA activities, compared to their urban counterparts who spent 41.06 hours (males) and 9.16 hours (females). By 2019, rural males and females spent 30.57 hours and 10.15 hours, respectively on SNA activities, while urban males and females spent 33.6 hours and 7.35 hours, respectively. Extended SNA activities were consistently higher for rural females, emphasizing the greater burden of unpaid work in these areas, likely due to limited access to labor-saving technologies and greater involvement in subsistence activities.

Overall, these trends highlight persistent gender disparities and the ongoing challenge of time poverty, particularly for females in rural areas. While there have been some improvements, such as increased time for non-SNA activities and a slight reduction in the disparity of extended SNA activities, the data underscores the need for targeted interventions. Policies to reduce the unpaid work burden and promote equitable distribution of household responsibilities are crucial for addressing time poverty and enhancing the well-being of individuals, especially women, in both rural and urban settings. The increase in non-SNA activities reflects a positive shift towards valuing personal development and well-being, but efforts must continue to ensure that these benefits are equitably distributed across all demographics.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR REDUCING TIME POVERTY

Education and Skill Development: Investing in education and skill development is crucial for enabling women to overcome time poverty and achieve long-term success. Programs that offer flexible learning options, such as online courses and part-time study, can help women balance their

responsibilities while pursuing education and professional development.

Lifelong Learning: Promoting lifelong learning opportunities can help women continuously develop their skills and adapt to changing job markets. Employers and educational institutions should collaborate to offer training programs that accommodate the schedules of working women, particularly those with significant domestic responsibilities.

Technological Innovations: Technological advancements can play a significant role in reducing time poverty. Innovations such as time-saving household appliances, remote work technologies, and online service platforms can help women manage their responsibilities more efficiently.

Smart Home Technologies: Smart home technologies, such as automated cleaning devices and energy management systems, can reduce the time spent on household chores. These technologies can help free up time for women to focus on other important areas of their lives.

Remote Work and Digital Platforms: The rise of remote work and digital platforms has the potential to significantly impact time poverty. Remote work options provide greater flexibility, allowing women to manage their work and personal responsibilities more effectively. Additionally, digital platforms for grocery shopping, meal delivery, and other services can save time and reduce the burden of daily tasks.

From Time Poverty to Gender Equality: Policy Pathways for Women's Empowerment

Implementing and Promoting Paid Parental Leave: Governments should implement generous paid parental leave policies for both parents to encourage fathers to participate in caregiving, ensuring balanced childcare responsibilities. Paid leave should be well-compensated and non-transferable between parents, supplemented by public awareness campaigns promoting shared caregiving.

Subsidizing and Expanding Access to Childcare Services: Affordable childcare can be achieved through subsidies, enabling women to engage more

in the workforce. Governments should invest in high-quality childcare centers with flexible hours to accommodate working parents, reducing the childcare burden on women.

Promoting Flexible Work Arrangements: Flexible work policies, such as telecommuting and flexible hours, should be encouraged to help both men and women balance professional and domestic responsibilities. Policies should also give employees the right to request flexible work arrangements without fear of discrimination.

Encouraging Equal Participation in Household Responsibilities: Education and awareness campaigns challenging traditional gender norms and emphasizing shared household responsibilities are crucial. Integrating gender equality education into school curricula can foster these values from a young age.

Financial Incentives for Shared Responsibilities: Tax credits or benefits for families that equally share household and caregiving responsibilities can encourage equitable distribution of unpaid work. Subsidies or tax deductions for hiring domestic help can also alleviate the burden of household chores.

Supporting Single Parents: Targeted support programs for single parents, including financial assistance, affordable childcare, and flexible work options, are essential. Community support services, such as after-school programs, can provide additional resources for single-parent households.

Encouraging Male Participation in Domestic Work: Mandatory paternity leave policies and public recognition programs for men actively participating in household and caregiving responsibilities can normalize and encourage male involvement in domestic work.

Addressing Workplace Culture: Mandating gender equality and diversity training in workplaces to challenge stereotypes and implementing equal opportunity policies in recruitment, promotions, and career development can promote gender equality and address the unequal distribution of unpaid work.

Research and Data Collection: Collecting and analyzing data on unpaid and household work distribution to inform policy decisions and measure progress is crucial. Regular surveys and studies should track changes and assess the effectiveness of gender equality policies in this area.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of time use data from the 2019 Time Use Survey, along with a comparative study of 1998 and 2019 data, reveals persistent and significant gender disparities in the allocation of paid and unpaid work in rural and urban India. Women consistently bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic services, spending an average of 301 minutes per day on these activities in rural areas and 293 minutes in urban areas, compared to 98 and 94 minutes for men, respectively. In contrast, men dominate paid employment, with rural men spending 434 minutes per day and urban men 514 minutes, while women spend only 317 and 375 minutes, respectively. This imbalance restricts women's opportunities for paid employment and contributes to higher levels of time poverty, which is exacerbated by societal expectations and caregiving responsibilities.

Despite improvements in non-SNA activities, such as learning and socializing, where both genders increased their participation, the gender gap remains notable. The comparative data from 1998 and 2019 underscores that while there have been shifts in time allocation, the reduction in SNA activity participation was more pronounced among females, widening the disparity.

The insights from this study emphasize the urgent need for targeted policy interventions, such as flexible work arrangements, increased public investment in childcare services, and promoting gender equality in household responsibilities, to mitigate time poverty and promote gender equity. Empowering women with better access to education, technology, and professional opportunities will improve their quality of life and contribute to the broader socio-economic

development of the country. Additionally, fostering a culture that values and supports the shared responsibility of domestic duties between men and women will alleviate the dual burden carried by women, enhancing their ability to participate fully in the workforce and society. Continued research and data collection are imperative to track progress and inform effective policy-making. By addressing these challenges comprehensively, India can create an inclusive environment where both men and women can thrive, ultimately leading to a more balanced and prosperous society.

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