

# **“NO ONE WILL SAY HOMEMAKERS DON’T WORK” A STUDY IN DHAKA CITY TO EXPLORE THE PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN ON REDEFINING UNPAID WORK: RECOGNITION OR REDISTRIBUTION?**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyses the multiple dynamics of getting recognition for unpaid work based on the perceptions and expectations of both employed and non-employed women from middle and lower middle class in Dhaka city. The study follows qualitative research methodology through conducting semi structured in-depth interviews with 40 married women. The findings underscore that women’s perceptions on unpaid work are widely diverse and depend on their economic class and employment status. Still a good number of women believe that they are born to do unpaid work and women should not demand any financial benefits in return of their care and domestic work. Besides, there is a few women who strongly support the idea of wage creation for unpaid work, either from state, husband or from both. A huge difference has been identified between the amount of money argued from different categories of women based on their economic class, employment status and other conditions of life. The findings also unfold wage creation is not sufficient to ensure the social recognition for women’s housework. Strong family bonding, respect, appreciation, happiness, and leisure can be the alternative ways of social recognition for unpaid work. Moreover, women also demand for men’s participation in the unpaid work.

**Keywords:** Unpaid work, Women, Recognition, Social recognition, Redistribution.

## **1. Introduction**

Women’s empowerment in Bangladesh has focused on women’s participation in paid work as one of the indicators and this is reflected in both policies and

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research thus ignoring women's unpaid work as one of the contributions. Women in Bangladesh have joined the labour force in very large numbers in the last two decades, which can be related to the growing awareness within them of the need for an increased level of entitlement for their hard labour. This shift in the type of labour force structure has also brought up the realization that there are challenges on women who are faced with the daunting task of balancing employment and domestic chores. There is a new crisis for women to bear the "double burden" (Choudhury et al., 2009). Moreover, non-recognition of women's unpaid work not only leads to undervaluation of their economic contribution but also contributes to their lower status in society relative to men (Kabeer et al., 2011). Most of them are assumed to be passive dependents with no economic agency of their own because of the way society interprets women's work (Mahmud, 1997). The time consuming and arduous nature of unpaid work reinforces gender inequalities especially among those who cannot afford paid care, by impinging upon women's education, restricting mobility, putting women at greater risk of gender-based violence and limiting women's political participation (Espen 2009; Huq, 2015). However, the fact that care giving is so naturalized –even by women themselves –as something women do and hence not an issue that could be rendered as the subject of public contestation and policy making which acts as a barrier to its politicization (Razavi, 2011). In this circumstance unpaid work needs a paradigm shift in policy conception if "welfare of women" truly of prime concern. Besides, women's increased labour force participation, labour migration, and greater investments in female education are squeezing women's time to spend on unpaid work leading towards a massive risk of care crisis. Both recognition and redistribution of unpaid work therefore is an emerging development concern, which requires immediate attention in research and will lead towards more equitable policy-making.

There is a growing debate about the financial recognition of women's unpaid work in a patriarchal society where most of the women do not have the right to decide what to do and what not to do, even it is a cruel reality for their longer hours dedicated to unpaid work (Kang'ethe, 2009). In this regard, hearing the voices of care givers is crucial as they are important stakeholders in the policymaking process. However, the gender-blind policy making process in Bangladesh pays little attention to women's voices and demands. Due to the top-down policy making process, their opinions remain unheard which in turn results in the state's failure to formulate context specific effective policies. Existing policies mention women's unpaid work in relation to explaining their gender roles with an inadequate focus on reduction and redistribution of it (Huq, 2015). Existing studies also immensely

stress on estimating the value of women's domestic activities and care activities for family without rendering much emphasize on exploring their challenges and demands. There are very few studies who tried to explore the perceptions of women on the realistic value creation of unpaid work in Bangladesh (Islam & Jannat, 2016). Moreover, Bangladesh is a class-based society but most of the government policies didn't consider the class-oriented need and requirements. In light of the above discussion, this article tends to explore the multiple dynamics of redefining unpaid work based on the perceptions and expectations of both employed and non-employed women from middle and lower middle class in Dhaka city, Bangladesh.

## **2. Recognition or redistribution: Theoretical approach**

Taylor (2004) defines “recognition as a vital human need, a deep-seated anthropological fact of the matter about the inter-subjective measures of human beings”. Consequently, recognition is the best treated issue of social status which functions as the essential and necessary condition for the formation of an intact personal identity. Honneth (2001) argues that the struggle for recognition to have an anthropological character because an individual cannot develop a personal identity without recognition. Honneth's approach of recognition has strong focus on subjective experience and inter-subjective exchange which make it possible to analyse recognition of unpaid working contexts with a special focus on an individual's experiences and motives. Honneth pointed out that contemporary logic of work is unable to provide adequate forms of recognition. In his studies, the theoretical approach regarding recognition has different dimensions like love, solidarity and equal treatment with regard to law. According to Honneth (2004) recognition is based on following grounds: (i) the private sphere comprising family and friends: a mode of practical relations to oneself; emotional support enhances self-confidence. (ii) the sphere of rights and legal entitlements; self-respect as a citizen, (iii) the sphere of cultural and political solidarity; self-esteem that redeemed by social solidarity. The theory suggests every member of the society entitled to recognition for his or her contributions of the reproduction of the society. The theory also claims the struggle for redefinition of what counts as work and legitimate source of recognition is futile. Individual takes sole responsibility for his or her accomplishments in order to survive. Honneth (2004) suggests that an expansion of the concept of work could occur so that more diverse notions of accomplishments could come under one umbrella.

Fraser (2009) focuses on the point that there are two roots of gender injustice: socio-economic and cultural or symbolic. Redistribution and recognition are two

co-fundamental dimensions of justice. Socio economic injustice is embedded within the political economic structures of society; whereas economic structure of society denies women the resources they need to fully participate in social life as it institutionalizes sexist mal-distribution. No zone of the society could be purely economic or purely cultural, albeit not necessarily in equal portions (Fraser, 2003). Fraser adds that there are two types of remedies: affirmative and transformative. Whilst both responses aim to make social arrangements more equitable, only those that are truly transformative in nature restructure the underlying framework of these inequalities. The use of recognition as the sole category of normative reflections and approaches is inadequate. It is found that deconstructive recognition is a matter of justice as that of agency and it is just a matter of freedom. Justice today requires both redistribution and recognition. Through using the concept of recognition and redistribution the study tries to unfold middle class and lower middle class women's opinion and suggestions about the realistic value creation of unpaid work in Bangladesh.

### **3. Methodology and data collection**

This study follows qualitative research methodology. As it focuses on the pattern of gender roles within household with the increasing participation of women in paid work, along with the debates on recognition and redistribution, the study required qualitative in-depth analysis. The study conducted semi structured in-depth interviews with 40 married women from Dhaka city. Women from two economic classes (middle class and lower middle class) were included as participants. The class has been defined on the basis of household income range where for lower middle class it was 30000-60000 taka and for middle class 60000-100000 taka per month. Among the participants, 20 women belonged to middle-class; both employed and non-employed and other 20 women belonged to lower-middle-class; both employed and non-employed. The age group of the participant varied from 20 to 50 years, and they belong to both nuclear and extended families.

The study focuses upon diversity and other social differences among the participants living in Dhaka city and an intersectional lens has been applied while selecting the participants. In order to analyse the selected issues, we collected qualitative responses from particular areas- Azimpur, Old Town, Badda and Indira Road of Dhaka city, Bangladesh. The sampling process took place in two stages. Primarily, the method of snowball sampling was applied since family income and distribution of household chores are considered as personal matters and many people seemed unwilling to share this information. Later on, we applied the method of purposive

sampling to unlock the interconnected issues related with socio-economic dynamics with household and care giving responsibilities of women in urban households.

Interviews were conducted focusing on bringing out in-depth information at mutually agreed upon times and places. We used semi-structured questionnaire to collect primary data for in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted for an average of 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded with informed consent and later transcribed, and the transcriptions were included with an initial summary. This study follows thematic analysis and interpretation that helped to define the theme of raw data, split them into small units and analyse the categorized themes. The anonymity of each participant was maintained as the names of the participants have not been revealed.

#### **4. Findings and discussion**

The findings confirm that women’s own perception of the of unpaid work engagement are diverse. The contexts in which women live their lives as mothers, wives and daughters are socially constructed and culturally marked and shaped; consequently, women are generally habituated to carrying out the care work in a regular way. A large group of women accept it as the normal or natural way to doing things as a fact difficult to resist and more difficult to claim for recognition. Szurek (1997) made the observation that the ways in which a society defines women and values their household, care and domestic work capability, are displayed in their cultural treatment. Unpaid work is culturally appropriate, socially acceptable, and morally underpinned and prepares women to take on the burden of unpaid work. As a result, there is little cultural space available for alternative ways of thinking or knowing about unpaid work.

##### **4.1 Do not want remuneration: It will make the situation worse off**

Interestingly along with the line of patriarchal construction, still a good number of employed and non-employed women from both middle and lower middle class believe that they are born to do unpaid work and they are very good as well as perfect to handle them as they have been doing these kinds of jobs since their childhood (Cain et al., 1979) and family is a place of love and affection- here women should not demand any financial benefits in return of their care work (Graham, 1983). That is why, commodification of care work is neither feasible nor desirable. In this regard, one of our non-employed women from lower middle-class group stated that:

*How can I demand wages for taking care of my own children and family? Family is a place of love and affection [...] I do not think that giving wages to homemakers will solve the issue. In fact, it will get even more complicated. [...] if you want women's recognition, you can do it in many other ways i.e., spreading female education.*

Additionally, an employed woman from middle class group stated her remarks as below:

*Unpaid work is a form of responsibility for both men and women and as far as its recognition is concerned, there must be other ways to solve this issue [...] But, getting paid for performing the chores at own house would be too much because we do it for our dear family members (our husbands and children).*

Moreover, care work is embedded in close relationships, which is experienced as a labour of love (Beneria, 1999). Therefore, quite a few numbers of women feel that wages or any recognition for care work could destroy blood relations and emotional bonding within the family. They feel that an economic understanding of unpaid work will disintegrate the emotional significance of unpaid work. They are against any kind of recognition because they feel unpaid work is something personal and cannot be influenced by any kind of political regulations. In particular, there is another group of women who feel that their labour of love cannot be brought or sold because it has an additional work value, which goes beyond money (Graham, 1983; March & Mukhopadhyay, 1999). An employed woman from lower middle-class group delineated her views as below:

*Wages for unpaid work might turn out to be harmful for family bonding because then, everything will become commercial as well as affection and mutual respect among family members might extinguish. As a result, home will eventually become a place to earn money and will consequently lose its peace and beauty. Therefore, wages for unpaid work will be beneficial for neither our family nor society.*

Another employed woman from middle class group opined that:

*No money can recognize my love and contributions for my family. As why, the value of my unpaid work is uncountable what it goes beyond any monetary recognition.*

In addition, the orthodox socio-cultural dynamics of socialization process makes women's understanding in such a way where a good number of them are not

interested to get the financial benefits for unpaid work. The social expectations and values of motherhood create the complexities of demanding financial recognition for their unpaid work. Being a mother or a wife, it becomes very difficult for women to raise their voices for financial recognition. The hegemony of classic patriarchy also instigates the idea of becoming ideal mother or wife among women and teach them to deny the idea of getting financial benefits for their unpaid work and sacrifice their “longer hour work” in the name of love irrespective of their employment status. One of the employed women from lower middle-class group shared her opinion like following way:

*I don't think that it is right to evaluate unpaid work in terms of monetary value because we do it for our dear ones out of love and affection.*

In this aspect, another employed woman from middle class group stated her remarks as below:

*First of all, I want my children to succeed in their lives. But if I demand money for nurturing them [...] they might get distracted and fail to achieve their goals. Hence, I might get identified as a “bad mother”. That is why, I do not need any wage. I am happy with what I have.*

The socialization process of our patriarchal society encourages women to denounce the idea of economic recognition for unpaid work irrespective of their economic status. The situation of not being interested to get financial recognition for unpaid work is also found in the middle-class households, though the ratio was quite lower than lower middle-class families. Only a few non-employed participants from middle class families do not pursue the idea of recognition for their unpaid work because they perceive it to be their natural duty and believe that it should be done by them at any cost for the sake of the wellbeing of own family members and conjugal life (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). One of the non-employed women from middle class group said:

*I cannot even think of getting paid for my care work; in fact, having these kinds of thoughts is even a sin for me. The rate of divorce is already so high in our society. On top of that, if women start getting paid for their care work, the rate will be on ever increase, as a result, our society will face a real crisis. There is no way to recognize unpaid work as equal to paid work, because they are neither equal and nor can ever be. They are completely different from each other, and paid work has its own importance.*

It resembles how our patriarchal society worships to women's ideal hood and devalues their unpaid work (Sangari, 1993). It is nothing other than just an emotional blackmail to women for not getting the amount of money for their "longer hour work", because the masculine nature of social practices is afraid of women's financial recognition for their unpaid work, as it will increase their socio-economic status in the society.

However, a few non-employed women from lower middle-class group nurture a thought that in the form of monthly pocket money, they are already getting wage from husbands for their unpaid work, thus, they don't need any additional recognition. In this aspect, one of our non-employed women from the lower middle-class group stated her opinion as below:

*Getting wage for unpaid work [...] what is new in that? My husband already gives me a certain amount of money each month for my personal expenditures and in exchange of that, I look after the family. Now, you tell me, isn't that a payment? What else do we need for it?*

#### **4.2 No alternative to recognition: Remuneration vs other ways to do it**

Over time, however, a changing perspective on getting financial recognition for women's unpaid work can be noticed. Most of the women think that recognition of unpaid work will provide them with power, freedom and decision-making capacity both within and outside the household (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020). These new perspectives are the exclusive results of increased educational quality, growing job market competition, high costs of daily life in the city areas and of course current generations being more aware of gender issues than the previous ones. Especially, in recent time, women are getting aware of their rights, empowerment, and development issues. Various activities by the government and NGOs are promoting the idea that homemakers do work too which directly contributes to the national economy of a country (Antonopoulos, 2009; Ghosh, 2021). If women's unpaid work gets counted, it will double the national GDP. Not only that, recognition of care work also involves in making the contribution of care givers visible and can provide a basis for measuring a planned government policy (Antonopoulos, 2009; Khatun et al., 2020). However, there is also a growing debate on which way to pay homemakers for their unpaid work. Apart from these debates, we came to know from our participants, both employed and non-employed belonging to middle and lower middle class that they are interested to get financial benefits. This ratio is quite higher for the employed women from both the groups. However, there are



a handful of employed women in Bangladesh who want financial benefits for their homemaker sisters before themselves. An employed woman from the middle class group expressed her regards in the following way:

*Economic recognition is a very good option to improve the status of homemakers in Bangladesh. If they earn money, it will secure some respect and value for them.*

If we turn to homemakers, one of them from the lower middle-class group stated her opinion in this regard as below:

*This payment will somehow give us the taste of independence in life. Though my husband never neglects my needs, it would be really great if I can earn of my own though unpaid work.*

Based on these statements, it can be claimed that financial recognition is becoming a burning issue for women to ensure their values and social position both within and outside the family. Without getting financial recognition in exchange of unpaid work, women’s contribution in the family will not be considered under the national economy and it will always remain uncounted as work (Galardini & Ferrer, 2020; Huq, 2013), although they are investing a huge time every day in their respective best ways. Regarding this issue, an employed woman from the lower middle-class group stated like below:

*Economic recognition of women’s unpaid work might bring in several positive changes in the society. If homemakers start to earn, no one will underestimate their work anymore. Most importantly, no one will ever say that homemakers don’t work and rest at home for whole day.*

Overall, most of the women are now highly interested to get financial benefits for their unpaid work, its recognition and identification in the society. Even middle class employed, and non-employed women are very aware and sensitive that there is no conflict between money and love in getting paid for their unpaid work. Rather it will increase their socio-economic status and decision-making capacity both within and outside the household (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020). Besides, this money will inspire them to work more dedicatedly like other professional workers. One of our employed women from the middle class group shared her views like the following way:

*I find the debate between money and emotion as a quite irrelevant one. Just because a woman will take money for her unpaid work - does not mean necessarily that she will become commercial overnight. In fact,*

*remuneration will work as an incentive for the homemakers to work with more dedicated efforts who have spent their entire lives in the kitchen in exchange of nothing.*

If really it happens to provide financial support to recognize women's unpaid work, from the field we came to know about a challenge of doing so. There are some employed women from the middle-class group, who are ready to leave their business or other work to get involved in unpaid work. It will also be helpful for them to take care of their children in a proper way. So, there is a scepticism that due to the remuneration of women's unpaid work, their agency and mobility might shrink even more in the society. In this aspect, one of our employed women from middle class group said her opinion like below:

*I would like to get paid for my unpaid work. And, if ever that happens, I will leave my business to put more effort in bringing up my daughter. I feel guilty for not being able to provide enough time to her. If women will be paid for their "care and domestic work", then, "paid work" will eventually become an option for them, not an obligation.*

The issue is every woman irrespective of employment status must do to unpaid work to some extent. If it is started to count, then employed women's household contribution is also to be counted, because of what their financial contribution will be counted based on both inside and outside work. So, automatically it will get doubled than full time homemakers which will ensure their socio-economic identity. In this aspect, there will be a fewer chance for employed women from both middle and lower middle-class group to leave their jobs.

Besides, though there is a growing concern and debate that women should have economic recognition now, there is also a force to ensure their social recognition first (Rost, 2015). In our society, mostly homemakers are not identified as working individuals as they do not perform their work outside home and earn directly (Shelton & Daphne, 1996). To challenge this traditional notion, a good number of both employed and non-employed middle-class women are focusing on the importance of the social recognition of their unpaid work besides its remuneration. One of our middle classes employed women stated her views in this matter like the following way:

*The best way to recognize a homemaker's work is showing proper respect towards her. According to me, social recognition of a woman's work can be more significant than it economic recognition.*

There is another group of participants consisted of both employed and non-employed women who don’t want economic recognition for their unpaid work. Instead, they expect state to deliver special facilities and services to care givers which will work as support systems if needed. Besides social recognition and social support systems, holidays (weekly/monthly) and frequent outings have been identified as another prime need of homemakers for their recreation. This demand is noticed to prevail more vigilantly among the group of middle-class women irrespective of their employment status. In this aspect, a non-employed woman from the middle-class group stated that:

*In the name of challenging the trend of 24/7 housework, only 24 (hours) gets focused but what about that seven (days). It goes completely unnoticed. Those who are involved in paid work, get a weekly holiday of at least one or two days. That is why, homemakers too should have at least one official weekend. On that day, they will not be entitled to fulfil any of their family responsibilities (apart from only those which are mandatory and must be performed). They will have an entire day for themselves.*

**Index 1: Economic Vs social recognition of unpaid work**

Economic recognition		Social recognition	
<b>Inclusion in national GDP</b>	Inclusion of unpaid work into national GDP will make women’s contributions for their families and society look visible. Also, if such valuation could be made, the GDP of Bangladesh will increase by many folds	<b>Successful family life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping relationships intact</li> <li>• Strong family bonding</li> <li>• Wellbeing and happiness of family members</li> <li>• Better futures (education/ career) for children</li> </ul>
<b>Wages for domestic and unpaid work</b>	Monthly wages will lead ways towards economic empowerment of the homemakers as they will have their own earnings. It will somehow give them sense of independence	<b>Love, respect and appreciation from others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love, affection and care from family members</li> <li>• Appreciation from family and society</li> <li>• Respect, honour and dignity in family and society</li> <li>• Individual happiness</li> </ul>

<b>State sanctioned social support and protection systems</b>	Special facilities and services to care givers can work as support systems. Monthly stipends, special transport services, technology, day-care centres, jobs from home from the government can help caregivers to have a balanced and happy life	<b>Access to recreation and entertainment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate rest (physical/ mental)</li> <li>• Leisure activities (television/ music/ reading/ personal care)</li> <li>• Breaks from unpaid work</li> <li>• Vacations, holidays (monthly/annually)</li> <li>• Weekends (going out for meals/ movies)</li> </ul>
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The women of Bangladesh argue that the strongest bond of relationships and feelings are found within the family while marriage means social and religious commitment to live together, and family means to carry out relationships not wearing money (Fraser, 2000). Here, household and domestic work is a prime source of self-esteem for a handful of women. It is also referred as “labour of love” that is situated within close relationships (Beneria, 1999). Hence, a fraction of the participants doesn’t want any recognition at all. Some of the women are afraid that wage creation may prove to be detrimental for their family bindings and close relationships. Their point is economic work takes place in marketplace and that too are performed under competitive conditions for profit making; while housework is carried out to maintain the family relationships. Another scepticism is society might underestimate their pure love and care for dear ones due to the remuneration of care and domestic work.

On contrary, a fraction of the participants is looking for alternative ways of recognition – mostly in terms of social aspect. They have recommended some qualitative indicators as best ways to recognize unpaid work instead of its wage creation. These participants from both middle and lower middle-class groups have manifested intangible demands such as love, care, affection and appreciation from their family members while others urge to get proper respect, dignity and honour as care givers from both family and state, because the invisibility of their contribution results in lack of honour and respect for care givers at all spectrums of society. There is another group who want appreciation for accomplishing household and domestic chores at both society and household level. The practice of “appreciating care givers” need to start from within home by their family members and it will automatically create awareness throughout the entire society. The study has also identified a few participants who want nothing other than happiness as a reward for

their day long service. They simply want a healthy environment within households ensuring mental happiness for them.

A few participants have listed demands such as rest, recreation, entertainment and holidays (monthly/annually) as ways to recognize the care givers. Current studies unfold that care givers throughout the whole world are suffering from both physical and mental illness due to their 24/7 unpaid work (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018; Seedat & Rondon, 2021). The eight-hour work week does not apply to them; there is no weekend, no casual leave and no sign of a vacation. For remedy, welfare measures should be taken to prevent this alarming situation. The homemakers of Bangladesh from both middle and lower middle classes are aware of this fact. Thus, they demand for regular exposures of entertainment, recreation as well as weekly holidays such as paid workers. Moreover, it is a right of every citizen to get proper quality of care while the costs and burden should be more evenly distributed. If it happens, caregivers will no more need to sacrifice their time, needs, choices, leisure and opportunity.

#### **4.3 Economic recognition: From whom and how much?**

In order to get the recognition for unpaid work, women from both categories belonging to middle and lower middle class clearly argued that the state should take the responsibility to ensure their financial recognition. If government takes the responsibility to count women’s household-based care and domestic work, it will increase their family income. On the flip side, if they take the money from their husbands, there will be no chance of increasing family income. Besides, some women propose different amount of money that should be paid to the homemakers. On this regard, one of the employed women from lower middle-class group expressed her opinion in the following manner:

*I want wage from state, not from my husband [...] It is not because I want my total family income to increase, but, because my husband does unpaid work too. So, why should only my work be recognized? Instead, state should recognize the unpaid work of both of us*

The fair amount of wage for unpaid work is another grossing debate in the present context. Nevertheless, the preferable amount varies from person to person with different economic status. Regarding it, one of our non-employed women from middle class group implied that,

*If state gives wage to homemakers, it should not exceed the range of*

*30,000-40,000 BDT as we are a poor country. However, taking such an initiative might be really very challenging for our government.*

To determine the wage for unpaid work, most of the lower middle-class women shared similar opinions although there is a difference to indicate the range of money from the middle-class group. Most of the lower middle-class women are demanding very lower amount of money on the basis of their daily financial experiences or family income. Even the amount of money also differs between the lower middle class employed and non-employed women. Regarding the amount of payment, one of the employed women from lower middle class shared her opinion like:

*The probable amount can be about 15,000 BDT because I think it is enough for a woman to meet up her basic needs.*

However, one of our non-employed women from the same group emphasized on pocket money instead of formal payment for valuing her unpaid work. The idea of pocket money will not raise any debate at the “payment concept” has chances. According to her:

*Well, I definitely support this idea. [...] but I would like to call it as monthly “pocket money” instead of using the term “payment” because I find it a bit contradictory. Besides, the estimated amount for pocket money should not exceed 3,000 BDT because I think, the amount is enough for a woman’s personal expenditure.*

The findings of the study reflect women’s strong desire for their unpaid work’s recognition especially from the middle-class group due to the socio-economic differences and diversities from the lower middle-class group. The amount of money argued from different categories of women from both middle class and lower middle class has been widely different. However, there is a one common thing that every woman has same opinion to get the recognition from the state as it will increase their total family income. Additionally, they want recognition from state because there is a possibility that if women are given wages from their husbands, it might eventually create a rigid hierarchical relationship between them (husband as employer- wife as employee) as well as affect their conjugal lives adversely.

#### **4.4 Redistribution of unpaid work: Involvement of men**

The issue of men’s involvement is as demanding as the issue of the financial recognition of women’s unpaid work that needs to be considered seriously in

the present context to remove the “double burden” of women. The unequal care burden curtails the enjoyment of women’s and girls’ human rights, including their right to education, paid job, work, social security and participation, as well as their rest, recreation and leisure (Esplen 2009; Huq, 2015). The sustainable development goals [SDG 5.4] support the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. If it happens through the proper redistribution of unpaid work between men and women, women will be able to work in a pleasant way both outside as well as inside the household. This sharing will also be helpful for them to be physically fit and healthy (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018; Seedat & Rondon, 2021). The redistribution of unpaid work is said to strengthen the mutual understanding and respect between life partners. However, sometimes the family members, even the homemakers themselves are not ready to see their husbands, brothers or sons working in the kitchen due to our socio-cultural practices (Shourabh, 2007) and this scenario is mostly common for the non-employed women from lower middle-class group. In this regard, one of our non-employed women from middle-class group stated that:

*I don’t think that equal sharing of unpaid work is possible because he works at office, and I work at home. And I think neither he nor I will be able to contribute equally to each other’s work*

The patriarchal social expectations allow and value only the household responsibilities of lower middle-class women and socialize them like this way. Due to such gendered cultural practices, a good number of women also believe that men should not be involved in unpaid work (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). However a portion of women think that unpaid work should be distributed between men and women equally to reduce the burden from women. One of our non-employed women from this economic group expressed herself as below:

*There should be a distribution of unpaid work. Because, due to every day’s overloaded household burden, “housewives” like me quite often feel extremely frustrated and pressurized. Men should understand our feelings and help us after returning from office.*

In terms of middle class employed women, there is a huge changing perspective due to their socio-economic background and socialization process, though there are also some common things like lower middle-class group. In this aspect, one of our employed women from middle class group shared her opinion as:

*One day my husband was washing our clothes. My mother suddenly noticed that and scolded me. Although, I felt very guilty initially, later, I realized that me and my husband should be equally responsible for performing domestic chores as the house belongs to both of us..*

The traditional norms and values force both the middle and lower middle-class women to be involved in the household and care work in the name of sacrifices for meeting the ideal image of motherhood and womanhood (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Men's involvement in the household level is recently becoming an important issue in the development table due to the expansion of labour market and women's increased participation in it for the wellbeing of family (Haque, 2016; Oláh et al., 2018). Many women are also demanding that their husbands should share some of their work and responsibilities that will make them more confident to work properly and in a pleasant way. Though there is a growing demand that men should share domestic responsibilities with women, it does not necessarily indicate that if any man is not involved in unpaid work, it is because he is non-cooperative. For some cases, it revealed that the working nature and time are so tight for some husbands that they do not have enough time to help their wives regularly. Besides, some women do not need their husbands help for doing unpaid work as they have enough supportive hands to share the responsibilities. However, it's a growing demand from most of the women to redistribute the unpaid work between men and women equally to manage their household and outside work properly. In this regard, one of our employed participants from middle class group argued that:

*Men and women can be equally good at performing household chores. Our society often assumes that men do not know how to perform them. It is just a lame excuse of men to escape from their household responsibilities because they are nothing impossible to be learned, if someone truly tends to.*

The amount of time that a husband should spend to do unpaid work is another glaring area of debate. On this regard, the perceptions and expectations of wives widely vary based on economic class and employment status. Lower middle-class women, both employed and non-employed, expect their husbands to spend a greater number of hours in unpaid work as they are financially less capable of hiring helping hands. On the contrary, when it comes to middle class group, the non-employed women cherish similar kinds of expectations while the employed women believe that the expected number of hours should be in accordance with the type and nature of work their husbands are involved with. An employed woman from the middle-class group professed her thoughts as under:



*It completely depends on what kind of work your husband is doing. For example: my husband can help me because he has a lot of free time. Contrarily, my sister’s husband works in a private bank and my own brother is an NGO worker. They must work outside home from nine to five and even longer hours occasionally. So, it is not possible for them to be as helpful as my husband, at least, in terms of involvement in unpaid work.*

Participation of men into the unpaid work can bring some relief and possibilities of breaking the stereotypes for women’s “housewifization” (Haque, 2016). Though the gender relations and mindset do not allow the issue into the broader spectrum, the changes have started to take place and current generation men are thinking about their roles and responsibilities in a different way (Oláh et al., 2018).

Due to changing perspective of labour market and women’s involvement in the job sector, redistribution of unpaid work between men and women has become an essential issue (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018) alike ensuring recognition. Without measuring and redistributing the unpaid work, the socio-economic development of women remains a long way to go (Ferrant et al., 2014). Therefore, both recognition and redistribution are two important essential ways to guiding how to deal with unpaid work in the development and in the arena of macroeconomics.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

The study addresses that the issue of valuing this unpaid work remains debatable between the middle class and lower middle-class people in Bangladesh. The study notices that there is no single dimension of opinion towards recognition of care and domestic work; their position is almost fluid. GDP does not measure happiness or quality of life but only the possibility of happiness. We need to propose GDP measures more meaningfully because it seems to advertantly ignore the social and economic costs for doing unpaid work. A new paradigm of development that needs to capture subjective aspects that can measure family happiness. Layard (2009) claims that the subjective satisfactions is the only indicator to measuring social progress while others claim that happiness is too subjective for the social progress (Nussbaum, 2008). Thus, the measurement of progress has to consider higher aspects in quality of life and development beyond basic economics. There is a need to redefine the meaning of development and that is only possible when the traditional definition of work is changed, and the so-called housewife is renamed because women’s subordination has been justified in many ways. We will have to identify the problems through using intersectional lens and solve the problems by

using human lens. We do not want only development, which only brings money; we want to ensure human development, which will ensure the dignity and quality of life to all. Inclusion of unpaid work will be a new point to be added to the development agenda, and a positive subjective step in the development process. The study brings about a variety of thoughts and queries, which can be used to find out the appropriate solutions. Prices alone do not capture family values because they are unrelated to real value. Commodification of women's labour means it leads commercial response into non-commercial motivations. Under such circumstances, policies should be made to involve men in care giving roles for the elderly and children in order to reduce the burden on women only and recognize unpaid care and domestic work from a broader perspective. It is clear that it would be very challenging if we never convey actual change without addressing women's actual roles in society and its roots. We need to rethink what progress of the society means and what aspect should be measured in what way.

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