Essays on Unpaid Work in India

Abstract

The thesis examines three critical aspects of unpaid work in India, focusing on state interventions aimed at recognizing and reducing the disproportionate unpaid work burden borne by women.

The first essay examines the impact of state-provisioned childcare on women's participation in the labour market. Using the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019–21 and pre-school services at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) as a proxy for childcare, the paper finds that utilization of AWC pre-school services raises a woman's probability of working by 5.5 percentage points, suggesting that extended, quality childcare provision could enhance women's labour market participation in rural India.

The second essay investigates the impact of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) adoption on adolescent time use patterns and intra-household work allocation. Using the Indian Time Use Survey 2019 and an instrumental variable (IV) strategy exploiting village-level variation in LPG penetration, the paper finds that LPG significantly reduces girl's unpaid domestic and care work predominantly through the food preparation and cleaning mechanism, with freed time flowing primarily to leisure, self-care, and market work, alongside suggestive gains in learning. Additionally, the adoption of LPG does not lead to a more equitable redistribution of domestic and care work within household members.

The third essay critically examines definitions and measurement of work in official Indian labour force surveys and compares existing survey instruments to evaluate their effectiveness in capturing women's work. The essay highlights inherent biases in statistical systems that render women's work invisible, particularly unpaid economic work. At the policy level, it argues for harmonizing labour force surveys with time use surveys as a way forward.

Keywords: Unpaid work; Care and Social infrastructure; Time use; Measurement of work

JEL classification: J16; C81; J21; J22; I38