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Providing Unpaid Household and Care Work in the United States: Uncovering Inequality

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In the United States, women spend considerably more time than men over their lifetime doing unpaid household and care work. The unequal distribution of this work—work that is essential for families and societies to thrive—not only limits women’s career choices and economic empowerment, but also affects their overall health and well-being. In recent years, the gender gap in unpaid household and care work in the United States has narrowed as more women have entered the labor market and men have taken on more of this work, yet it is unlikely that a significant further shift can occur without public policies that better support families with unpaid care responsibilities (Samman, Presler-Marshall, and Jones 2016). Increasing societal investments in care, and strengthening supports for working adults that allow them adequate time for providing unpaid care for their loved ones, would affirm the value of unpaid household and care work and contribute to the well-being of households, communities, and societies. These shifts are critical now, especially as the need for care for older adults in the United States is growing rapidly (Mather, Jacobsen, and Pollard 2015).

Many studies have examined the gender gap in unpaid household and care work and its causes, yet few consider how women’s experiences with this work might differ across demographic groups and how the size of the gender gap in household and unpaid care work might change when the full range of household and care work activities, including elder care and “secondary” as well as “primary” child care, is considered.¹ This briefing paper draws on relevant literature

¹ In primary child care, the caregiver engages in an activity with the child. In secondary child care, the caregiver has at least one child in their care while doing other activities, such as cooking or laundry; data on secondary elder care are not available. In this paper, secondary child care work is considered as a separate activity, counted independently even though it may be performed while doing housework or primary care work, such as when someone arranges a medical appointment for an elderly relative or empties the dishwasher while ensuring that a five-year-old stays out of trouble. Such multitasking requires a more intense effort than doing one task at a time; taking into account multitasking or work intensity provides a better measure of actual time spent in unpaid work activities since it gives insight into a person’s quality of life and well-being, including the extent to which they may experience “time pressure” or “time squeeze” (Floro N.d.). In addition, if these tasks were replaced by paid-for services, they would each count separately in terms of their economic contributions; the inclusion of overlapped activities, therefore, also

and analysis of data from the 2018 American Time Use Survey to examine the relationship between unpaid work and gender economic inequalities in the United States. It begins by analyzing gender differences in the amount of time spent on unpaid household and care work by age, marital status, race/ethnicity, migration status, employment status, and education and income levels to assess how demographic factors may shape women’s experiences of this gap. The briefing paper then considers the relationship between women’s earnings and unpaid household and care work activities to assess how increased time spent on unpaid work might affect women’s earnings and economic security. It concludes with recommended changes to public policies in the United States that would recognize the value of unpaid household and care work and facilitate more equitable distribution of this work between women and men.

The Gender Gap in Unpaid Household and Care Work: Across All Demographic Groups, Women Do More than Men

As is true around the world, women in the United States have disproportionate workloads for unpaid household and care work. Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) analysis of data from the 2018 American Time Use Survey shows that among adults aged 15 and older, women perform unpaid household and care work amounting, on average, to 5.7 hours per day compared with 3.6 hours for men.² This means that on an average day, women in the United States spend 37 percent more time on unpaid household and care work than men.

This pattern, in which women perform a much greater share of unpaid household and care-related tasks, holds true at all ages (Figure 1; Table 1). When comparing men and women of different age ranges, the largest differences are among younger women and men. For those aged 15–24, men perform tasks amounting, on an average day, to 1.7 hours of unpaid household and care work, a full two hours less than the amount of time women spend, resulting in a gender gap of 54 percent (meaning that women spend 54 percent more time on this work than men). Among those aged 25–34, a time when many families are raising young children and some are also caring for aging parents, the average hours spent on unpaid household and care work increases for both women and men. Yet the difference is still substantial: men in this age range spend 3.9 hours per day on this work compared with 8.0 hours for women, a gender gap of 51 percent. Men and women aged 35–44, who also may be caring for both children and older adults, spend the most time on unpaid household and care work (5.2 hours on an average day for men compared with 8.8 hours for women; Table 1).

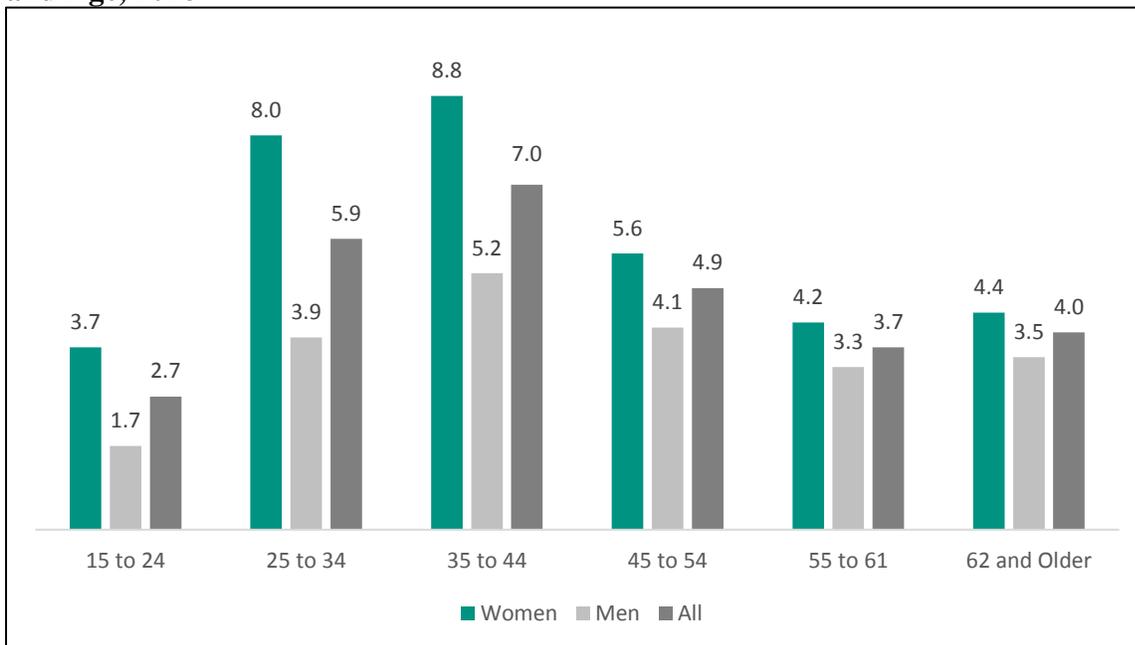
provides a better estimate of the significance of unpaid work to economic growth (Floro and Miles 2003; Floro N.d.).

² Care work includes secondary child care as well as primary child and elder care.

The gender gap in unpaid household and care work is larger for married women and men than for those who are unmarried (separated, divorced, widowed, or never married; Table 1). This may be partly because those who are married and have the support of a spouse are able to devote more time to this work. In this paper, the analysis examines the time spent on unpaid care by all married women and all married men and does not look at the distribution of this work within couples; other research, however, has found that same-sex couples tend to divide unpaid housework and care work more equally than heterosexual couples (see, for example, Tornello, Sonnenberg, and Patterson 2015; Patterson, Sutfin, and Fulcher 2004).

On an average day, women in the United States spend 37 percent more time on unpaid household and care work than men.

Figure 1. Average Hours per Day Spent on Unpaid Household and Care Work by Gender and Age, 2018



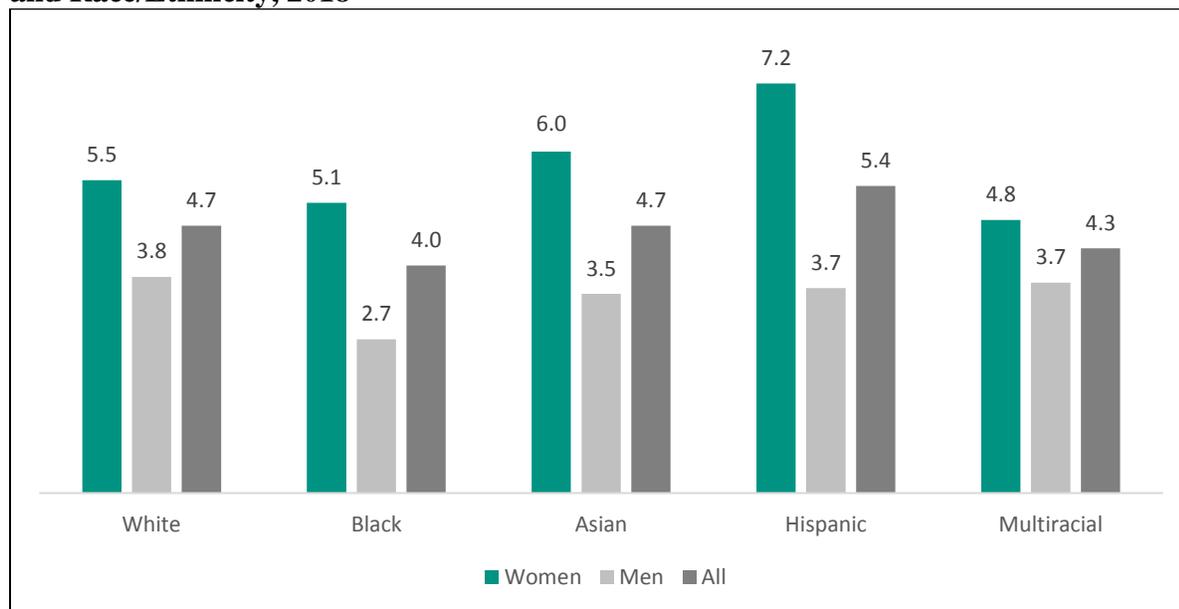
Notes: Aged 15 and older. Care work includes secondary child care as well as primary child and elder care. Secondary child care is considered as a separate activity and is counted independently even though it may be performed while doing housework or primary care work.

Source: IWPR analysis of American Time Use Survey microdata.

Substantial differences exist in the amount of time spent on unpaid household and care work among women and men of each of the racial/ethnic groups shown in Figure 2, as well as among

women of different races and ethnicities. Women in each group spend more time on this work than their male counterparts, with the largest difference between Hispanic women and men (the unpaid housework and care-related tasks that Hispanic women perform take 3.5 hours more per day than those performed by Hispanic men). Hispanic women also report spending considerably more time on unpaid work than women of all other racial and ethnic groups, and spend over an hour a day more than Asian American women, the group with the second-largest amount of time spent on unpaid household and care work (7.2 hours compared with 6.0 hours).

Figure 2. Average Hours per Day Spent on Unpaid Household and Care Work by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2018



Notes: Aged 15 and older. White, Black, and Asian are non-Hispanic. Sample size is too small to report for Native Americans. Care work includes secondary child care as well as primary child and elder care. Secondary child care is considered as a separate activity and is counted independently even though it may be performed while doing housework or primary care work.

Source: IWPR analysis of American Time Use Survey microdata.

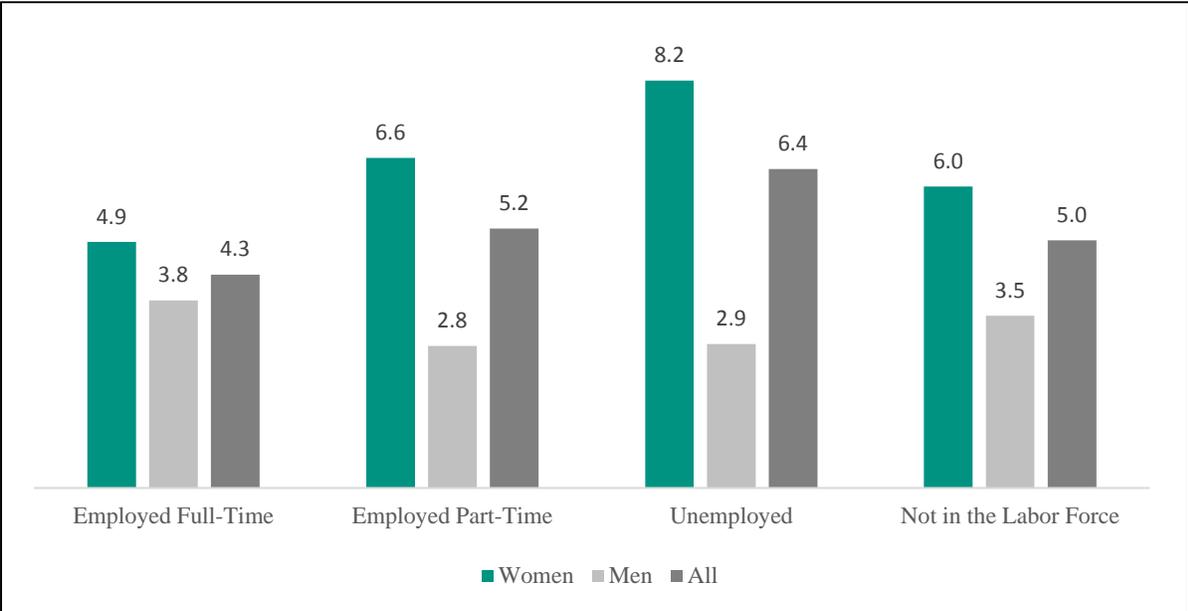
The gender gap in unpaid household and care work decreases, but does not disappear, when women are in full-time, paid employment. Women who are in the paid labor force full-time (defined as 35 hours or more per week) spend an average of 4.9 hours per day on unpaid household and care work, compared with 3.8 hours for their male counterparts, resulting in a gender gap in unpaid work of 22 percent. This time spent on unpaid work is considerably less than the time spent by women who work part-time (6.6 hours) or are unemployed (8.2 hours) or not in the paid labor force (6.0 hours; Figure 3 and Table 1). The gender gap in unpaid time is larger among women and men who work part-time than those who work full-time. Reasons for part-time work, and the likelihood of working part-time over the life cycle, vary strongly between women and men, and women are much more likely than men to work part-time because of child care and other family care obligations (Hegewisch and Lacarte 2019).

The gender gap in unpaid household and care work also persists across income and education levels. As Table 1 shows, women and men in the lowest income bracket spend the least time on unpaid household and care work, and women and men with less than a high school diploma spend less time on this work than those with higher levels of education. This smaller amount of time spent on unpaid work may be due, in part, to the fact that many people with low wages work more than one job to make ends meet, allowing less time for household tasks and family care. In addition, low-wage jobs are less likely to offer paid time off (U.S. Department of Labor 2019a), leaving workers without the ability to take time to attend to family members’ needs.

While factors such as employment status and age may affect the extent of the unpaid household and care work that women and men do, the gender gap in unpaid work persists when these factors are taken into account. Women do nearly two hours of unpaid household and care work more per day than men when controlling for age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, employment status, place of birth (whether born in the United States or elsewhere), and family income (Appendix Table I) using a multivariate regression model.

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Figure 3. Average Hours per Day Spent on Unpaid Household and Care Work by Gender and Employment Status, 2018



Notes: Aged 15 and older. Care work includes secondary child care as well as primary child and elder care. Secondary child care is considered as a separate activity and is counted independently even though it may be performed while doing housework or primary care work.
 Source: IWPR analysis of American Time Use Survey microdata.

Table 1. Average Hours per Day Spent on Unpaid Household and Care Work, United States, 2018

	Women	Men	All	Gender Gap		Women	Men	All	Gender Gap
Age					Employment Status				
15–24	3.7	1.7	2.7	54%	Full-time	4.9	3.8	4.3	22%
25–34	8.0	3.9	5.9	51%	Part-time	6.6	2.8	5.2	58%
35–44	8.8	5.2	7.0	41%	Unemployed and looking for work	8.2	2.9	6.4	65%
45–54	5.6	4.1	4.9	27%	Not in the labor force	6.0	3.5	5.0	42%
55–61	4.2	3.3	3.7	21%					
62 and older	4.4	3.5	5.9	20%	Family Income				
					\$0–\$29,999	5.5	3.4	4.5	38%
Race/Ethnicity					\$30,000–\$59,999	6.1	3.6	4.8	41%
Asian American	6.0	3.5	4.7	42%	\$60,000–\$99,000	5.6	3.6	4.6	36%
Black or African American	5.1	2.7	4.0	47%	\$100,000 and more	5.7	3.8	4.8	33%
Hispanic or Latina/o	7.2	3.7	5.4	49%					
White	5.5	3.8	4.7	31%	Birthplace				
Multiracial	4.8	3.7	4.3	23%	United States, including U.S. territories or military bases	5.4	3.6	4.5	33%
					Outside of the United States	7.6	3.8	5.7	50%
Highest Level of Education									
Less than high school diploma	5.1	3.1	4.1	39%	Marital Status				
High school diploma or equivalent	6.0	3.5	4.7	42%	Married	7.1	4.7	5.9	34%
Some college education or associate's degree	5.6	3.4	4.6	39%	Widowed/divorced/separated	4.8	3.2	4.2	33%
Bachelor's degree or higher	5.8	4.1	5.0	29%	Never married	4.1	2.1	3.0	49%

Notes: Aged 15 and older. White, Black, and Asian are non-Hispanic. Sample size is too small to report for Native Americans. Care work includes secondary child care as well as primary child and elder care. Secondary child care is considered as a separate activity and is counted independently even though it may be performed while doing housework or primary care work.

Source: IWPR analysis of American Time Use Survey microdata.

Unpaid Household and Care Work Reduces Women’s Employment Options, Earnings, and Economic Stability

The disproportionate share of unpaid household and care work that women perform has a range of costs for them, including employment and economic costs. Caregiving takes time, and when caregiving duties become extensive, many caregivers cut back time in paid work (Lilly, Laporte, and Coyte 2007), in part because the high cost of paid care makes it unaffordable for many families (Hess et al. 2015). Most caregivers who reduce their hours at work or step out of the paid labor force altogether are women (U.S. Department of Labor 2018b), since for many families it makes economic sense for the woman to be the one to reduce her time in the paid workforce, given women’s lower average earnings. While some women may want to reduce their hours at paid work to spend more time with children or other family members who need care, for others the “choice” to not participate in paid work is constrained by the impossibility of meeting the demands of both their paid employment and their family’s needs (Hegewisch and Lacarte 2019). A lack of family-friendly work policies in many workplaces, such as paid family and medical leave and paid sick days that would allow one time off from work to care for a sick child without penalty, exacerbates the challenges many workers face in meeting both family care and work demands, and results in lower rates of labor force participation for women in the United States compared with other high-income countries (Blau and Kahn 2013).

The decision to reduce time at paid work owing to the demands of unpaid work (or to continue full-time employment without putting in long hours at paid work) has both short- and long-term economic consequences for women. As Cha notes (2010), reducing time in the paid workforce can lead to fewer opportunities for advancement, since “making it to the top” in managerial and professional occupations often requires working long hours, and management may interpret a worker’s “unwillingness” to work these hours as a sign of lack of dedication to their job. These more limited opportunities for advancement can contribute to the gender gap in earnings women face; although the gap exists at younger ages, it increases when women and men reach their early thirties (Hegewisch et al. 2015), a time when many are raising young children. While men may also face consequences at work if they request time to provide care, the data show that more women reduce time in the paid workforce. As a result, many men continue to receive promotions in the earlier years of their career, while women’s upward mobility stalls (Benard, Correll, and Paik 2007; Benard and Correll 2010; King 2008).

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The decline in the gender earnings ratio during child-bearing years suggests that the gender wage gap over a lifetime is much larger than in any one year. When the earnings for all women and men who worked in at least one year in the previous 15 years are taken into account, Rose and Hartmann (2018) found a gender earnings ratio of only 49 percent, a much larger wage gap (51 percent) than the 20 percent gap usually reported. Forty-three percent of women workers during this time had at least one year with no earnings, more than twice the rate of men. Both women and men suffered earnings losses for time out of the paid labor force; for women and men who took just one year off from work between 2001 and 2015, their earnings in the years with work were 39 percent lower than the earnings for those who worked continuously for all 15 years (Rose and Hartmann 2018). Losses for those who take four or more years out of the paid workforce in this 15-year period are particularly steep for women (whose earnings are 65 percent lower than those of women who worked continuously; men's earnings are 57 percent lower than for those who did not take time out of the paid workforce). As noted, women are more likely to take time out of the paid workforce for reasons related to care. Lower lifetime earnings due to time out of the workforce leads to a lower Social Security benefit in retirement (Social Security Administration 2019), making it more difficult at older ages for women (and men) to make ends meet.

While women's lower earnings compared with men's are not due solely to the unequal distribution of unpaid household and care work, this work plays an important role. IWPR analysis of ATUS data finds that a 1 percent increase in time spent on unpaid work is associated with a 0.062 percent decrease in women's weekly earnings when controlling for age, education, race/ethnicity, marital status, place of birth, and family income. Unpaid work has no effect on men's earnings when controlling for the same characteristics (Appendix Table 2).

The negative association of unpaid work on women's earnings is largest for women in higher-income families (those with annual incomes above \$60,000; Appendix Table 2). This does not mean, however, that the impact in less well-off households is less significant. As noted, the gender wage gaps in lower-income households are smaller than in higher-income ones partly because lower-income households cannot afford to cut back hours of paid work. Any negative impact on women's earnings makes it more difficult for these households to build savings and prepare for eventual retirement. Time conflicts between the need to provide care and the need to make ends meet may also reduce the quality of care that many low-income families are able to provide.

The Gender Gap in Unpaid Household and Care Work Affects Women's Health and Overall Well-Being

Spending time on care for elders or children can be satisfying and a source of considerable happiness. Connelly and Kimmel (2014) find, however, that while parents often enjoy spending time caring for their children, fathers are much more likely to enjoy such time than mothers. This

is possibly because for fathers the time spent on unpaid care is more likely to represent a positive choice and less likely to have come at the cost of dialing back career advancement. At the same time, fathers report growing work-family conflict, which may be partly a result of lower social acceptance in the sphere of employment for their role as care providers (Connolly and Kimmel 2014). While both women and men may want to provide more care for their children or for other family members, without adequate resources and external supports their provision of this care can lead to significant stress.

Work-family conflict can reduce mental and physical well-being; these effects are particularly strong in relation to elder care. Elder care needs are increasing rapidly (Mather, Jacobsen, and Pollard 2015) and may arise more suddenly and intensively than child care needs, making them harder to prepare for (Reinhard et al. 2011) and more stressful than other caregiving demands (Perrig-Chiello and Hutchinson 2010). Combining employment with these caregiving responsibilities—particularly for women—leads to significantly higher levels of stress than those experienced by non-caregiving peers (MetLife 2011). A survey of more than 1,200 unpaid caregivers in the United States who care for an adult found that 22 percent feel their own health has declined as a result of their caregiving, physically or emotionally (or both). Nineteen percent reported experiencing a high level of physical strain as a result of their caregiving, and 38 percent said they find the work stressful. Those in more difficult care situations—such as those caring for someone with a mental health issue or residing with the care recipient—experienced higher levels of emotional strain (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP 2015). This strain may especially affect women of color, who have higher rates of both paid (Hess and Hegewisch 2019) and unpaid caregiving (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP 2015).

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Jobs that provide little flexibility in work hours and limited control over one's work schedule and location add to the stress for workers with caregiving responsibilities. As a result, some researchers suggest that many employees could benefit from organizational interventions to train supervisors to be more supportive and to give workers more schedule control and ability to work from home (Kossek et al. 2019; Moen et al. 2016). One study that tested the effects of such an intervention for elder care workers found that paid care workers, especially those with care responsibilities at home, may experience reduced stress and psychological distress as a result of interventions to increase social support for work and non-work roles, and job control (Kossek et al. 2019).

Reducing time in the paid workforce may also help alleviate this stress, particularly for dual-career couples whose financial situation can weather the decrease in income. As noted, however, it can also have implications for women's career trajectories and advancement. One study found that once caregivers reduce their time in the paid labor force, they are unlikely to return to their previous levels even after their caregiving responsibilities end (Wakabayashi and Donato 2005).

The high levels of time demands that come with caring for an adult or for children can result in caregivers' limiting their participation not only in the paid workforce but in other activities as well. One study that analyzed when and why women decide to run for elected office, for example, found that many women delay running because of their child care responsibilities (Baer and Hartmann 2014). Another study that examined time spent in work and leisure found that among all women and men aged 15 and older, a "leisure gap" exists: while women and men spend about equal amounts of time on work (with men spending more on paid work and women more on household and child care), men spend, on average, approximately six hours more per week (49 minutes per day) doing leisure activities, such as playing sports, watching TV, socializing, and playing games (U.S. Department of Labor 2019b).

U.S. Public Policies Contribute to the Devaluation of Unpaid Household and Care Work and the Gender Gap in This Work

The social norms that contribute to women's providing the lions' share of unpaid household and care work and men's more limited participation in this work also contribute to a devaluation of unpaid household and care work. As Appelbaum et al. (2002) observe, in the United States this devaluation is reflected in the absence of public policies to meet the needs of working families, such as affordable, high-quality child care and paid sick leave. It is also evident in policies such as welfare "reform," or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which emphasizes "work first" over "care first," placing greater value on having a woman work a minimum-wage job than care for her children, though her earnings in this job will fall short of providing her family with basic economic security. This devaluation of care work extends to the paid care workforce, where workers—predominantly women, especially women of color—provide services for low wages (Hess and Hegewisch 2019). In part because they are doing work traditionally done by women in the home for free, these workers are often not seen as making a real contribution to the economy and deserving of decent compensation (Andolan et al. 2010).

Some researchers argue that the devaluation of unpaid household and care work is exacerbated by the historical exclusion of unpaid care services performed in households from measures of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), the estimated market value of all goods and services produced in the country in a given year. They suggest that, as a measure of the nation's wealth and economic well-being, GDP falls short in some ways, including its failure to account for the

economic value of household and care work performed in families (e.g., de Leon 2012; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2011). This failure to include unpaid care services when estimating the nation’s economic productivity and well-being contributes to the relatively low societal value placed on unpaid (as well as paid) care work, prompting researchers to explore ways to assign a monetary value to unpaid care (Folbre 2012a) and incorporate “household production” into GDP (Eisner 1989). One National Academy of Sciences report recommends that statistical agencies develop satellite accounts for household production and health (Abraham and Mackie 2005). A study by Bridgman et al. (2012) constructed a satellite account estimate of GDP for the United States that includes the value of household production and estimates that incorporating unpaid domestic work would have raised the level of GDP by 26 percent in 2010. Folbre (2012b) argues that even this figure likely significantly underestimates the actual contribution of unpaid care work to GDP, in part because it is based on survey data that measure only time spent performing specific activities and does not include, for example, being on call to supervise young children or adults in need of care.³

Public Policies Can Increase the Social Value of Unpaid Household and Care Work and Promote Its Equitable Distribution

Although in some ways the United States has made great progress toward gender equality—as seen in women’s increasing advances in education and greater participation in the paid labor market, for example—the unequal gender distribution of unpaid household and care work remains a factor that continues to hinder women’s economic and overall well-being and affect the well-being of families and communities. Public policies that support the social value of unpaid household and care work can facilitate the more equal distribution of this work between women and men and improve women’s economic and health status. While these policies would benefit all women and men who must balance paid and unpaid work, they are especially critical for low-income working adults, who more acutely feel the impact of any loss of resources due to work-family conflict. The United States, however, lags behind many other high-income countries in providing policies that support the value of unpaid household and care work and its equitable distribution (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011; Stanfors, Jacobs, and Neilson 2019). Now is the time to enact such policies, especially given the rapid increase in the need for elder care.

Recommended changes include the following:

Invest in child care infrastructure that allows women (and men) to have a real choice about whether to take time out of the paid workforce to provide child care. The availability of quality, affordable child care is essential to the well-being of working families and to enabling the equal

³ The same limitation applies to the analysis in this briefing paper, which, like the study by Bridgman et al., draws on the American Time Use Survey. This survey includes time spent on primary and secondary care but not the constraints of being on call to provide care.

distribution of unpaid work. Without access to affordable child care, many working parents, particularly mothers, do not have a real choice about whether to participate in the paid labor force. Universal pre-kindergarten and more affordable quality care for younger children would help many women who want to remain in the paid workforce; better alignment of the school and work day would also make it easier to balance the demands of work with those of the family.

In addition, state and federal governments should increase the amount of money dedicated to child care so that child care services reach all eligible children. States should also reconsider their “work first” policies under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs, which require parents with low incomes to take any job, even if it does not lift them out of poverty and forces them to choose between their work and caregiving. States should explore ways to structure their safety net programs so they value caregiving, allow parents to refuse jobs that do not fit with their parenting responsibilities, and ensure that when parents work, they have access to affordable, quality child care.

Improve public investment in the care of older adults and people with disabilities. An increasing number of people have caregiving responsibilities for older or other adult relatives. Raising investment in care facilities and in caregiving for adults within homes and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates will make it easier for those with family care responsibilities to stay in the paid workforce. These steps will also improve working conditions of those providing paid adult care, many of whom are older women, and increase job retention and the quality of care in this industry. Examples of state programs being tested include Hawai’i’s Kupuna Caregivers Program, which helps employed individuals who are also caring for a loved one by providing financial assistance for support services that allow their loved one to remain at home while helping the caregiver remain in the workforce (ADRC Hawai’i N.d.). They also include Washington State’s recently passed Long-Term Care Trust Act, which establishes a social insurance program to help state residents who have paid into the trust fund for enough time to be eligible to pay for long-term care, including assistance with activities of daily living (Auffill, Burgdorf, and Wolff 2019).

Support flexibility in working hours and locations. Many mothers and other family caregivers in the workforce may benefit from greater control over their work schedules, including the ability to work nonstandard hours and to telework. Alternative schedules can help caregivers organize their employment schedules around their care responsibilities and alleviate work-family stress. Scheduling flexibility, however, must be paired with schedule control; workers who face unpredictable schedules and do not have input on their working hours can find it especially hard to balance caregiving and work. Flexibility in work arrangements combined with scheduling control is a benefit more often available in professional and higher-paid jobs; many workers in low-wage jobs have little control over the timing of their work (Howell and Kalleberg 2019). Nonetheless, there are successful examples of provision of schedule flexibility in a broad range of work situations, including frontline and shift workers (Williams and Boushey 2010). A recent

intervention by Gap stores in California, for example, showed significant returns to employers who gave employees more say in scheduling their work (Williams et al. 2018).

Improve access to quality part-time work. For some working adults, part-time work is a desirable solution to balancing unpaid household and care work with the demands of a paid job. Parents, in particular, need to be able to reduce their hours at their jobs or access high-quality, part-time jobs to effectively balance caregiving responsibilities and paid work. Yet limiting hours at paid work can result in disproportionately lower earnings and a lack of career advancement. In addition, part-time workers in the United States are much less likely than full-time workers to have access to paid vacation, paid sick days, and other employment benefits (Hegewisch and Lacarte 2019). Equal treatment for part-time workers with full-time workers—as is common in Europe and other high-income countries (Fagan et al. 2012)—will provide pro rata benefits to part-time workers and make it illegal to pay them lower rates just because they work part-time.

Guarantee paid family and medical leave, and structure leave policies to encourage men’s participation. Lack of access to paid family and medical leave, including paid parental leave, makes it difficult for many workers to balance the demands of their jobs with the needs of their families. As of January 2020, nine states in the nation had passed paid family and medical leave legislation (Family Values at Work 2019), but many workers in these areas are not covered under these laws, and the lack of national legislation leaves many more without access.

The United States is the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country without a national guarantee of paid parental leave (Raub et al. 2018). Making parental leave available to both mothers and fathers, and structuring leave policies in a way that encourages both women and men to use them, would facilitate men’s increased participation in household and care work and promote the equal sharing of this work (van der Gaag et al. 2019). One study of the Quebec Parental Insurance Program (QPIP), which sets aside five weeks of nontransferable leave for fathers, found that when this nontransferable leave became available, the percentage of men who took paternity leave increased by 250 percent. Moreover, men who became parents after the introduction of the QPIP spent 23 percent more time on nonmarket household work after the leave program ended than did those who had become parents under Canada’s Employment Insurance (EI) system, which does not provide fathers with an individual and nontransferable right to parental leave. Mothers who experienced a birth under QPIP spent more time in paid work than did those who became parents under the EI system (Patnaik 2019).

Provide paid sick days. Access to paid sick days is also essential for workers seeking to balance the demands of their jobs with the needs of their families. As of November 2019, 50 localities in the nation had passed paid sick leave legislation, yet such legislation does not cover all workers in these areas, and many live in jurisdictions that have not passed a paid sick leave law. The consequences of not having access to paid sick days can be significant: in a survey of more than 1,400 adults conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, 16 percent of workers reported

that they had lost a job for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member or to cope with an illness themselves (Smith and Kim 2010). Enacting paid sick days legislation at the federal and state levels would make it easier for those with care responsibilities who want to work full-time to do so. It would also provide them with job protection that allows them to return to their job without loss of seniority or health insurance.

Close the gender wage gap. An equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men of unpaid and paid work cannot happen without closing the gender wage gap. As long as women earn less than men, it will make more economic sense for women, rather than men, to take time out of the workforce when their families need to reduce hours of paid work to meet their caregiving needs. Steps to close the gender wage gap and increase women's earnings include addressing occupational segregation, or the concentration of women in certain sectors of the labor market (such as care work, which pays less) and men in other sectors (such as technical or construction work, which pays more). They also include pushing companies to end pay secrecy and the practice of basing salaries on past salary history; finding ways to raise pay in jobs traditionally held by women; and improving the quality of those jobs through such policies as increasing the minimum wage, providing paid sick leave, supporting collective bargaining, and enforcing equal-pay laws.

Provide care credits for Social Security. Social Security provides a vital source of income for older Americans, particularly women and people of color (Hartmann, Hayes, and Drago 2011). As more women have entered the workforce, the number of women receiving Social Security benefits on their own employment record has grown, yet women's average monthly benefit remains much smaller than men's (\$1,297 compared with \$1,627 in 2018; Social Security Administration 2019). This smaller benefit for women is due in part to their lower earnings and greater likelihood of having taken time out of the workforce to provide unpaid family care. These disparities are magnified for women of color and leave many older women without the resources they need in retirement (Estes, O'Neill, and Hartmann 2012).

One way to improve Social Security for women and strengthen older women's economic security is to implement caregiving credits for those who take time out of the workforce to provide unpaid care for family members. Because of the nature of the formula used to calculate Social Security benefits (which calculates workers' average indexed monthly earnings during the 35 years in which they earned the most, factoring in zeroes if the workers worked fewer than 35 years), time taken out of the workforce for unpaid care can have a large impact on the benefit amount. A caregiving credit would allow adults not in the labor market because they are caring for children or elders to have earnings added to their records so that those years are not considered zero-earnings years in benefit calculations. This type of provision, which is already implemented in most member countries of the OECD (Fultz 2011; Jankowski 2011), would especially benefit low-income single mothers.

Improve estimates of the value of unpaid care work, and make the public more aware of this work's critical importance to the nation's economy. The federal government has produced satellite account estimates of GDP that include the value of household production. These estimates can continue to be improved and publicized. Providing more accurate estimates of unpaid care work and publicizing them widely is essential to increasing the value attributed to that work and better supporting unpaid caregivers through public policy. Recognizing the value of unpaid care work is, in turn, also essential for improving wages and job quality for those who provide care in the home. By explicitly acknowledging that household production is a vital part of the U.S. economy—and by including satellite accounts of household production wherever GDP is reported—researchers and policymakers can begin to undermine the common assumption that both unpaid and paid care workers in private homes are not contributing valuable work to the economy and that those who work for pay should perform these services at very low cost.

Appendix Tables

I. Unpaid Work Gap (in average hours per day) Controlling for Selected Individual Characteristics

Summary of regressions measuring the unpaid work gap (average hours per day)

	HH work	Care work (primary)	Care work (primary + secondary)	Total unpaid work (HH work + primary and secondary care work)	Observations
Female = 1 ^a	0.9***	0.4***	1.0***	1.8***	9,593
By Race^{b,c} (female = 1)					
White	0.8***	0.3***	0.6***	1.4***	6,401
Black	0.9***	0.4***	1.4***	2.3***	1,277
Asian	1.0***	0.4**	0.7	1.7***	446
Hispanic	1.3***	0.4***	1.7***	3.0***	1,321
By Family Income Quantile^d (female = 1)					
\$0 to \$29,999	0.8***	0.5***	1.6***	2.4***	2,413
\$30,000 to \$59,999	0.9***	0.3***	1.1***	2.0***	2,563
\$60,000 to \$99,999	0.9***	0.4***	0.9***	1.7***	2,147
\$100,000 and over	0.9***	0.2***	0.2	1.1***	2,470

Estimates are survey-weight adjusted.

*** 1% level of significance; ** 5% level of significance; * 10% level of significance.

a. Includes control for age, age-squared, race, marital status, education, birthplace, employment status, and family income.

b. Includes control for age, age-squared, marital status, education, birthplace, employment status, and family income.

c. Estimates for mixed category of race are not computed due to small sample size.

d. Includes control for age, age-squared, race, marital status, education, birthplace, and employment status.

II. Regression Estimates of Relationship between Weekly Earnings and Total Unpaid Work with Secondary Activities of the Individuals Aged 15 Years and Older Working Full-Time or Part-Time

Method:

$$\ln(\text{weekly earnings})_i = \alpha + \beta \ln(\text{total unpaid work with secondary activities})_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

	Women	Men	All
Log of unpaid work with secondary activities ^a	-0.062***	0.0004	-0.057***
Observations	2,657	2,470	5,127
By Family Income^b (Log of unpaid work with secondary activities)			
\$0 to \$29,999	-0.03	-0.1	-0.07**
Observations	444	344	788
\$30,000 to \$59,999	-0.04	0.02	-0.03
Observations	687	628	1,315
\$60,000 to \$99,999	-0.06**	-0.02	-0.04
Observations	675	664	1,339
\$100,000 and over	-0.1***	-0.05*	-0.1***
Observations	851	834	1,685

Omitted individuals with missing information.

*** 1% level of significance; ** 5% level of significance; * 10% level of significance.

^aFor computing log of weekly earnings and unpaid work with 0s, 0 in weekly earnings as well as unpaid work of individuals are considered to be 1.

^bIncludes control for age, age-squared, race, marital status, education, birthplace, and family income.

Methodology

For this study, IWPR analyzed data from the 2018 American Time Use Survey (ATUS), a nationally representative survey that measures the amount of time people spend doing various activities, such as paid work, child care, volunteering, and socializing. Respondents are sampled from the Current Population Survey and interviewed by phone about their time allocation for the diary day. The sample consists of women and men aged 15 years and older. IWPR analyzed the average hours per day women and men spend on unpaid household and care work. IWPR also conducted regression analyses controlling for a range of worker characteristics to determine whether the gender gap in unpaid household and care work disappeared when these characteristics were taken into account. In addition, IWPR estimated a simple model to examine the association between unpaid household and care work and weekly wages, controlling for the same worker characteristics of those who are employed.

Unpaid work was defined to include:

- 1) **Household work**, using the following ATUS activity codes: (2) Household activities + (7) Consumer purchases + (8) Professional and personal care services + (9) Household services + (1802) Travel related to household activities + (1807) Travel related to Consumer purchases + (1808) Travel related to professional and personal care services + (1809) Travel related to household services + (160104) Telephone calls to/from salespeople + (160105) Telephone calls to/from professional or personal care service providers + (160106) Telephone calls to/from household services providers.
- 2) **Care work**, including both of the categories below.

Care work as primary activity: The individual is mainly performing a given activity with or for the person for whom they are caring. This may include both children and older adults. Since 2011, the ATUS has collected data on the time spent providing unpaid elder care, but a younger adult or someone recovering from surgery or an injury, for example, may not be counted in the data.

IWPR used the following ATUS activity codes: (3) Caring For & Helping Household Members + (4) Caring for and helping nonhousehold members + (1803) Travel related to caring for and helping household members + (1804) Travel related to caring for and helping nonhousehold members + (160107) Telephone calls to/from paid child or adult care providers.

Care work with secondary child care: ATUS also collects information on the secondary child care of both household and non-household children aged 12 years and younger. Secondary child care is defined as time one has a child under 13 years old “in his or her care” while doing something else as a primary activity. For instance, an individual may supervise a child while cooking or doing laundry. Information on secondary child care is

not collected for children over 12 years old. Secondary child care is counted as a separate activity even though it may be performed while doing housework or primary care work.

In this briefing paper, total care work = Primary care work + Secondary child care.

Total unpaid work = Household work + Primary care work + Secondary child care.

Limitation: An individual may also provide secondary care to children aged 13 years and older as well as to individuals with disabilities or chronic illness or elderly people. Due to current data collection limits in the ATUS, however, IWPR can include secondary child care only for children aged 12 years and younger. This approach may underestimate the total unpaid care time.

All the analyses are survey weight adjusted.

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