

Unpaid Work and gender inequality in Armenia

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The Republic of Armenia is land-locked country located in the South Caucasus, to the South of the Caucasus Mountains and bordered from the East with Azerbaijan, from the west with Turkey, from the South with Iran and from the North with Georgia. Armenia is a mountainous country with territory of 29,000 square kilometers. The population is 3.2 million, of which about 70% live in urban areas. Over 95% of population is Armenian. Women are 51.8%.

Historically, through the ages, neighborhood with Islamic countries has its big impact on Armenian population mentality, traditions and habits, which are even today, create bases for and striking roots of some outdated elements of inter relation between women and men in family and society on the whole. Although Armenia as a first nation in the world to adopt Christianity as state religion in 301 A.D., and since the breakdown of Soviet Union is moving towards Western values in the field of Human rights and particularly of women rights (we already have ratified many International Conventions on human rights, as well as all other 190 countries we signed the Millennium Declaration, according which we should achieve the MDG goals up to 2015) and in the constitution equality between women and men has been clearly proclaimed but the reality is far from that, particularly in the field of decision making, labor and employment, business and in the family there is still exist violation of women rights.

According to survey conducted by the Armenian Association of Women with University Education half of respondents (49.7%) answered that equality between women and men are important issue for Armenia, 32.2% considered that this issue more or less important, 10.3% considered that it is not actual for society and only 4.9 % considered that there is no such a problem like gender inequality.

The World Women Report 2000 stated that while the women spend as much time as men on paid work, they spend twice as much more time than men on unpaid work.

Unpaid work of women and men in Armenia represents large contribution to economic activity but has not been reflected at all in the SNA. In general when we talk about economy we are sure that there are two kinds of economy: first produce general goods for consumption and second economy which we called a “care” economy, in which people care about each other and about environment where they are living. “Care” economy includes child care and rising, care for elderly people, education and health, religion and the arts and all other similar expenditures to protect our environment. We also know that these two economies are very closely related and integrated into each other but unfortunately we are very well informed about “main” economy but we do not know so much about “care” economy. We also sure that the “care” economy is huge but our national accounts can not measure part of “care” economy or in other words it can not measure unpaid work that women and men do in the households. What we can

do now is to take into consideration some obvious facts from our daily life and guess that “care” economy can be competitive with the “main” economy not only by financial values but also by spent time. Also we can see that although these two economies are closely related but sometimes grow and development in the main economy somehow have negative influence on “care” economy, particularly many people are struggling when trying to balance between these two economies and of course “care” economy always became a loser in this big battle. This imbalance displayed in people behavior as they became more and more irritable and unrestrained.

The biggest secret of this imbalance is hidden in the fact, that people can not organize or share their daily time between main and “care” economy. Before democratization of our society and breaking some old traditions we have simply divided roles for women and men in the society, particularly women were engaged in the “care” economy (mostly with little compensation or even without that) and men were engaged in the main economy, which make it simple for them to more clearly allocate their daily time on well-defined activities.

However, during the last decade, after adoption of some western values including liberalization of women “rights” which has shown through gender equality in different fields of life, women got the bigger opportunities to be more intensively involved mainly in the “main” economy, which increase very strongly average number of hours spent by women in the paid work and shifted care responsibilities in the family. The process of liberalization of women rights has its strong impact also on people mental and physical conditions, moreover, even these days when Armenia somehow still remains as a country with some strong traditions it makes somehow relationship between women and men more difficult and push rate of divorce up in consideration with 80th-90th.

According to analysis (based on official statistics data) done by the Association of Women with University Education year by year more and more women in Armenia are joining the paid labor force but at the same time the biggest part of responsibilities in the family are still on their “shoulders”.

However, there is still open question: who spends more time on unpaid work in Armenia, women or men? In this sense it is very important to have a sex disaggregated statistics on time spent on paid and unpaid work. Taking into consideration all the above mentioned in 2003 the National Statistical Service of Armenia with technical support of the experts from CSB Sweden and financial support of SIDA first time in Armenia has conducted Time Use Pilot Survey. According to the survey results the most obvious difference between women and men of age 15-80 concerns work in the broad sense. Women spend on average of one hour and forty

four minutes in gainful employment each day while the corresponding figure for men is five hours and eighteen minutes. Here we should make a note that 65 % of men and 34 % of women are actually in gainful employment on an average day, which means that the average working day¹ for men is almost eight hours and twelve minutes whilst the corresponding figure for women is five hours and four minutes. The structure of gainful employment shows how people survive in transition period. In average (on weekday) the most part of time spent on employment goes to working time on main job as employed (hired) regardless of sex. The gainful employment undertaken by women varies considerably between the family or lifecycle groups. Women have adapted their gainful employment to their life situation and its demands on housework more than men. With young children to care for, an activity which is defined in the survey as part of housework, gainful employment must move to the second place. When the children are older, these restrictions decrease. Gainful employment does not seem to have quite the same status for women and men. Two distinct tendencies could be assumed. For men, gainful employment is accepted as being the highest priority alternative. For women – at least when they have 0-5 years children – there is a tendency in the opposite direction. Housework comes first and gainful employment has to make way. Gainful employment does not ‘release’ women from housework to the same extent as it does men. As a consequence, the total work undertaken by women is greater than that for men.

The lesser part of time spent on employment goes to working time on main job on own or leased land and with own animals. On weekdays men spent twice less time on this activity, than for hired job, the women spent approximately the same time for both kind of employment. Figures for housework, or unpaid work², also differ considerably between the sexes, with almost six hours for women and one hour and forty five minutes for men. Most people, i.e. 96 % of women and 62 % of men, undertake some form of housework on a normal day. The total work, i.e. the sum of paid and unpaid work³, amounts to almost six and a half hours per day for men and seven hours and fifty one minutes for women. In other words, the time spent on productive activity differs between women and men (women spend one hour twenty three minutes more, than men) and takes up from 27 % to 33 % of the 168 hours in the week in total. However, the distribution between unpaid and paid work does differ. The women spend time on unpaid work more, than on paid work, whilst men-on the contrary-spent time on paid work approximately 5 times more, than on unpaid work. There is difference between the sexes as regards the time spent on the other two main groups of activities, i.e. personal needs and free time (Table B:1 in the appendix shows the activities which are included in each of these main

¹ Gross working hours, including travel relating to employment, etc.

² Household work, maintenance, care of children and others, shopping and services, travel related to housework

³ Includes time for study

groups). Together, they take up two thirds of the time available for women and three fourth – for men. The time spent on personal care does not differ between women and men (about 11 hours and three quarter), leaving from four to six hours for free time.

Unpaid work

Let us go into more details about activities which unpaid work – here also denoted housework – consists of, and how they are distributed between the sexes.

Housework is dominated by household work, i.e. food preparation, cleaning, laundry/ironing and dish washing. Almost all of this work is undertaken by women (about **four hours** per day versus **3 minutes** per day for men). Four of the activities (which are maintenance, care of children, shopping and services and travel related to housework), take an hour and forty minutes per day for women and an hour per day for men. Here we should pay attention especially to the estimate of care of children in two ways. The average forty-two minutes per day for women aged 15-80 and four minutes for men of the same age spend on child care, regardless of whether or not they have children. At the same time, the average two hours and ten minutes per day per women aged 15-80, who undertook this activity and fifty four minutes for men of the same age, spent on child care. Furthermore, it only concerns time which the people responding to the survey stated that they have devoted to actively caring for children. The estimate of how much time overall is spent by parents on and with their children is much greater and depends on what one considers to be caring for children, the age of the children, and the composition of the household but in general care of children is undertaken mostly by women.

Other activities like shopping and travel related to housework is undertaken by women and men to the same extent.

Helping others is also undertaken by women and men equally but this estimate is probably a poor indication of the actual extent of the occurrence. Much help to others is probably hidden in other activity categories.

In summary, we can conclude that in Armenia women spent five times more time overall than men on housework or on unpaid work.

Free time

This is not a big secret that the more time we spend on (paid and unpaid) work, the less time we have for such leisure activities as social life, hobbies, reading, sport, etc. According to survey results, there is a difference between the sexes regarding the time spent on free time, one of the main groups of activities. The average free time for men is approximately 6 hours, while the corresponding figure for women is 4 hours and 20 minutes.

As regards the number of hours of free time per day men have more free time than women during weekdays and weekends. On weekdays, the difference between women and men is less. The proportion of men with a significant amount of free time on weekdays is slightly greater than the corresponding proportion of women.

The conclusion is that, compared with women, men not only concentrate their work more on weekdays and the daytime, but they also concentrate their free time on weekends and evenings. They have slightly more pronounced daily and weekly patterns with a clearer distinction between the daytime and evenings, weekdays and weekends and between work and free time.

Summary

The time use statistics shows both similarities and differences between the everyday lives of women and men. The total time spent on undertaking work does differ. Gainful employment undertaken by women strongly depends on where they are in their lifecycle. Men devote more or less an equal amount of time to gainful employment throughout their lives up until retirement.

The only possible conclusion is that women take on more responsibility for work relating to the home and family, i.e. unpaid work. There is no doubt, that women take primary responsibility for the unpaid work. It should be emphasized, that unpaid work is productive and contributes, like paid work, the maintenance of individuals and families, albeit in a different way.

In addition to the skew distribution of work and responsibility, there are also other aspects of the activities of everyday life which differ between the sexes. The statistics shows that men are better able than women to make a clear distinction between work and free time. Men concentrate their work more clearly on weekdays and the daytime, whilst the work undertaken by women is distributed more evenly over the day. A further difference is that men enjoy free time in longer, continuous blocks. Women's free time is more fragmented and interwoven with periods of housework.

Against this background, it is possible to understand that there is a difference in the opportunity for women and men to reconcile gainful employment and private life. Men have greater freedom to allocate time to work when necessary. For women, the greater responsibility for housework represents a barrier.

The statistics indicates that a redistribution of housework is necessary, both as regards responsibility and time in order to even out the conditions.

It is not a secret that while women and men are engaged in paid work, their working conditions and opportunities may not be equal.