



BACKGROUND

THE EQUAL SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN, INCLUDING CAREGIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV/AIDS¹

The 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will take place 2-13 March 2009 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The theme of this year's session is "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS."

Women and men throughout the world continue to shoulder different responsibilities in public and private life, with most of the domestic and care work being assumed by women. This unequal sharing of responsibilities results in limited opportunities for women in areas such as education, the labour market and public life.

Policy and legal framework

In recent years, UN bodies have focused on the need to ensure more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men and have voiced the need for action in outcome documents of major UN conferences and meetings, including:

- the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994);
- the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995);
- the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (1995); and
- Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

In addition, several important United Nations Conventions provide a legal basis for the equal sharing of responsibilities:

- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- the International Labour Organization Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities

An unequal work-life balance between men and women

Both women and men undertake paid and unpaid work. Unpaid work includes activities such as working in a family business or farm, domestic work and looking after family members. Family members requiring care may be young, old, disabled, or may have an illness that requires long-term care, such as HIV/AIDS. The demand for caregiving has intensified due to the increased participation of women in the workforce, and the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, ageing populations and the erosion of traditional family support systems.

In both developed and developing countries, women are over-represented in the paid care and domestic work sector. The Luxembourg Income Study showed that in many high-income societies women represent 68 to 88 per cent of paid care workers, and 32 to 54 per cent of the total workforce. In Brazil, 18.3 per cent of employed women worked in the domestic service sector in 2006, compared to 0.4 per cent of employed men. In South Africa in 2005, 97 per cent of domestic workers were women.²

In all regions of the world, most of the household and caregiving work is done by women regardless of their socio-economic and employment status. As a result of this dual workload, women work longer hours than men and have less time for sleep, leisure and participation in public life. However, men's involvement in caregiving, and particularly in parenting, has increased over the past decades. A study conducted in Switzerland concluded that when parents share responsibilities, the whole family benefits. Family members develop a more egalitarian view of women's and men's roles. The study also showed that children growing up in more traditional families often regret their fathers' absence from their everyday lives.

Invisible and unrecognized work

The unpaid work of women, which also includes contributions to family businesses, remains largely invisible, unmeasured and undervalued. Unpaid activities are rarely taken into account in calculations of gross domestic product (GDP). Yet, estimates show that the value of unpaid work can be equivalent to half a country's GDP. In New Zealand, unpaid work carried out in 2001

¹ This document is based on two reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women: "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS" (E/CN.6/2009/2), and "Progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS" (E/CN.6/2009/4).

² UNRISD (2008). "The social and political economy of care: contesting gender and class inequalities." Background paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting (EGM/ESOR/2008/BP.3).

was valued at NZD\$40 billion, to which women contributed 64 per cent. Researchers have argued that women's unpaid domestic and care work, a crucial contribution to economic and social development, is a hidden subsidy to the economy, and a "reproduction tax" on women.

The unequal sharing of responsibilities is a barrier to women's full participation in the labour market. For example, in Latin America, over half of the women aged 20 to 24 cited their unpaid household duties as the main reason they did not seek paid employment. These women are often dependent on the income of male family members, which limits their influence in household-level decisions and can increase their vulnerability to violence.

To reconcile the need for income with household duties, many women resort to informal, temporary or part-time work, including domestic work. Women working in these sectors, or in jobs with low social status, are less likely to enjoy basic rights and access to social security and pensions. In many parts of the world, domestic workers (who are often women migrants or from minority groups) work under difficult conditions, do not have formal contracts or employee benefits, and can be subjected to discrimination and violence.

The unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men also restricts the participation of women in public life. As of 30 November 2008, women held only 18.4 per cent of the seats of national parliaments in the world, with domestic responsibilities often cited as deterrents to women entering politics.

Causes of inequality

A number of factors perpetuate the unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, among them discriminatory, stereotypical attitudes, and the lack of childcare facilities. In some countries, laws do not guarantee women equal rights within the family, or in the areas of divorce, inheritance, or ownership of property. This lack of protection in legislation limits the opportunities for women, and increases their economic dependence on men, thereby perpetuating their already disproportionate workload in the household.

Women's increased participation in the labour market has not been matched by a sufficient development of childcare facilities, with no formal childcare programmes for children under the age of three in almost half of the world's nations. This lack of reliable, accessible and affordable childcare, care for the elderly and services such as health clinics, exacerbate the caregiving burden placed on women.

Caregiving and HIV/AIDS

Over 33 million people worldwide live with HIV/AIDS and the need for caregiving for people infected with the virus is particularly acute. Only three million people are receiving treatment out of the nearly 10 million in need. In many developing countries,

public hospitals are overburdened and unable to provide the required care. Home-based care is provided by family members, neighbours and volunteers who are unpaid or receive a small compensation. These caregivers operate with little or no training or resources to safely perform their tasks, while suffering from stigma, discrimination and isolation within their communities.

While there is little systematic data collection on the sex or age of caregivers, it has been estimated that women and girls provide up to 90 per cent of the HIV/AIDS-related care. In southern Africa, research has shown that two-thirds of primary caregivers were women, and a quarter of these were over 60 years old, often grandmothers raising AIDS orphans.

Studies show that the economic pressures resulting from increased care work and foregone opportunities for paid work can lead to greater food insecurity in the household as well as to sexual risk-taking by caregivers, which can lead to new HIV infections and cases of violence against women. This problem is exacerbated in countries where women lack property and inheritance rights.

While women provide the majority of care work, it is possible that men's involvement in HIV/AIDS caregiving is underreported due to research biases. Evidence shows that men contribute by providing transportation, doing heavy lifting and providing financial support. In some cases, however, men face cultural barriers - including traditional notions of masculine behaviour - to fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities, even when they are willing to do so.

Multi-sectoral responses

The unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men has far-reaching policy implications and requires a multi-sectoral response. Lasting change in attitudes and behaviours and an overhaul of institutional arrangements are needed, requiring the full implementation of constitutional and legal provisions on family, marriage, divorce, inheritance, property rights, employment and pensions, which guarantee the equality of women and men.

Furthermore, women and girls need support with their existing workloads, and guaranteed access to education, employment and social protection. Increased investment in health and social services, and in the development of infrastructure (such as water, sanitation, transportation and energy), can contribute greatly to alleviating pressure on women and girls. In the context of the current financial crisis, it is particularly important to maintain public support to such services and programmes.

Reconciling work and family

A range of policy initiatives can facilitate women and men reconciling work and family responsibilities. A common policy response is the extension of employment benefits such as paid leaves. Both developing and developed countries provide maternity leave,

with paternity leave increasingly offered. Some countries also offer parental leave, which is available to either parent. Financing of paid leave works best through a form of social insurance or cost-sharing between employers, employees and public funding. Spreading the cost for paid leave across society helps minimize employment discrimination against women.

While leave is more widely available to men, their use of paternity or parental leaves has remained limited in most countries. Research shows that men fear that taking leave will be interpreted as a sign of low commitment to their jobs, and will negatively impact their careers. To encourage men to share responsibilities, some countries stipulate that part of the parental leave can only be taken by fathers.

Working part-time may provide solutions to workers trying to balance their work and family lives, but some disadvantages include reduced income, limited access to training, and lack of eligibility for promotions. Improving the quality of part-time work, through regulations on working conditions and social benefits, could lead to greater use of such arrangements by both women and men, and contribute to ending the perception that part-time work is only for women. The Netherlands, for example, encourages part-time work for all workers by providing everyone the right to increase or decrease working hours, regardless of their caregiving responsibilities.³

Men's participation in parental leave in Germany

In 2007, Germany introduced two additional 'partner months' to its parental leave provisions. As a result, the number of fathers who took parental leave increased from less than 4 per cent in 2006 to 20 per cent in 2008.

Innovative approaches to leave provisions and benefits

Some governments have put in place innovative measures to expand leave provisions and child support benefits, including granting maternity leave benefits to domestic and temporary workers, and establishing labour legislation and pension schemes with provisions for unemployed women.

Examples of pioneering measures include:

- In Central and Eastern Europe, grandparents are granted leave, underscoring the importance of inter-generational support.
- In South Africa child support grants are paid to the primary caregiver regardless of whether that person is the child's biological parent.

cal parent.

- The Self-Employed Women's Association in India, in collaboration with the Government and the insurance industry, provides a comprehensive package of social insurance benefits to informal women workers.

Paternity leave provisions in developing countries

The International Labour Organization (ILO) provides examples of leave provisions that can be used by fathers at the time of childbirth:

- Afghanistan: ten days of unpaid "essential leave" that can be used for the birth of a child
- Algeria: three days of paid paternity leave
- Indonesia: two days of paid leave at child birth or miscarriage
- Philippines: seven days of paternity leave for married workers
- Tanzania: three days of paid paternity leave
- Uruguay: three days of paternity leave for civil servants

Source: ILO Conditions of Work and Employment Database, www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/database

Engaging men and boys

A number of countries have conducted training and awareness-raising campaigns to engage men and boys in caregiving. Finland, for instance, established a Father of the Year Award, and improved support to fathers at maternity and child health clinics.

In Zimbabwe, a project supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented by Africare trained 120 men aged 20 to 65 to be volunteer caregivers for people living with HIV/AIDS. The involvement of male caregivers has helped challenge traditional notions of masculinity, and men suffering from HIV/AIDS-related illnesses have overcome their embarrassment and sought support.

Working with men to achieve gender equality

A number of networks and organizations have developed programmes to engage men and boys:

- The Sonke Gender Justice Network launched the One Man Can campaign, and offers a toolkit – available in multiple languages – with action sheets for coaches, fathers, teachers, religious leaders and youth.⁴

³ ILO (2008), "Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS" Background paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting (EGM/ESOR/2008/BP.2).

⁴ Sonke Gender Justice Network, <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/> (2008)

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- Instituto Promundo, a Brazilian non-governmental organization, developed Programme H, a set of methodologies to encourage men to reflect on stereotypes of masculinity. Programme H is now replicated in a number of countries around the world.⁵

Moving forward at CSW

The 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women provides an important opportunity to discuss the causes and consequences of unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in domestic and caregiving work, to assess current policy responses, and to recommend ways to strengthen policy at both the global and national levels.

Increasing the sharing of domestic and care duties between women and men is necessary but not sufficient to address the growing challenges of caregiving in society. As the HIV/AIDS pandemic has illustrated, all stakeholders – the State, private sector, civil society, men and women – must fulfill their responsibility for caregiving. Policy-makers must recognize that domestic and caregiving work are critical for societal welfare and socio-economic development.

⁵ Promundo, www.promundo.org.br/ (2008)