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Determinants of Unpaid Domestic Work: Evidence from Uganda

FLÁVIA DI CROCE PATRICIO

VICTOR MOTTA

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Abstract: Unpaid domestic work (UDW) has a straightforward relationship with a household's wellbeing and is indispensable for our daily lives. Time distribution for UDW activities between members of the household tends to be unequal between genders: women are usually associated with UDW and, thus, responsible for it. This paper aims to characterize factors that contribute to the increase or decrease of time spent in UDW related activities through regression analysis. Results demonstrated that civil status, age, household location, and gender are relevant determinants for UDW time allocation. Results and conclusion contribute to the elaboration of policies, social and economic actions that aim to decrease the gender gap of time usage for unpaid domestic work.

1. Introduction

Adam Smith theorized upon the existence of the invisible hand of the market. Yet, the dinner on his table existed not only because of the personal interests of the merchants but because Margaret Douglas, his mother, made sure that food was always served. Folbre (2001) discussed the existence not only of an invisible hand but of an invisible heart, an idealized image of the tasks historically assigned to women (Folbre, 1995). Would Adam Smith be a prominent classical economist without the unpaid domestic work of his mother?

Unpaid domestic work (UDW) can be defined as all labor that involves the maintenance of living spaces and supplying services such as health, transportation, administration, and education to family members (Picchio, n.d.). It uses scarce resources to fulfill human needs (Swiebel, 1999). Although having a straightforward relationship to the wellbeing of individuals and being indispensable for our daily lives, UDW is not counted as part of the Gross Domestic Product (Alonso et al., 2019). The issue of unpaid domestic work brings to light the magnitude of gender inequality in carrying the burden of domestic chores. Women provide more than three times as much as men in unpaid care work, and, also, countries with higher biases in gender norms are positively related to time spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work (*HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT.*, 2019).

Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa elucidate the association between female labor share and gender composition of the household's labor force as well as analysis of the effect of migration in labor economics also demonstrates the bias of work patterns between genders (Palacios-Lopez et al., 2017). Findings show that migrations decrease not only both female and male labor supply but also female labor supply in low-paid jobs and increase female employment in unpaid work (Mendola & Carletto, 2012). In Egypt, when migration occurs, females are more likely to increase their engagement in unpaid family and subsistence work, conforming with gender norms (Binzel & Assaad, 2011).

Understanding UDW as a gender-related topic is critical to economic analysis. There are challenges in developing tools to measure this analysis because of data unavailability for measuring unpaid work and gender. This occurs mainly because of social constructs that conceal the role of UDW in the economic structure since it is seen as female responsibility (Picchio, n.d.). The reduction and redistribution of unpaid domestic work is a critical issue when it comes to gender since the uneven distribution of UDW can result in women not fully exploiting their productivity potential as members of the labor force (Alonso et al., 2019). Women tend to choose lower skill level jobs and engage in part-time work to balance both paid work and UDW (Garnero et al., 2014). As a result, this may contribute to greater gender

inequality in unpaid work as well as widening the gender wage gap (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Although female labor force participation has increased in most countries, there is still a major gap between the participation of males and females in the labor force over the world. Mitigating the gender gap in labor force participation may increase worldwide GDP by 10 to 80 percent (Ostry et al., 2018).

Recognizing gender inequality in unpaid work is a key indicator under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to foster women's participation in the labor force and increase income levels. The purpose of this proposed study is to examine the determinants of unpaid domestic labor. More specifically, our goal is to investigate which characteristics account for UDW distribution. We anticipate that gender will be a determinant and that women are engaged in UDW for a greater amount of time.

Empirical evidence suggests that unpaid domestic work has a major economic impact which could amount up to 4% of GDP (Alonso et al., 2019). Understanding the determinants of UDW and time usage can help shed light on the economic value of unpaid domestic work and increase its social importance. Gender gaps in the economy are a major reason for the reproduction of stereotypes that diminish the relevance of women's greater labor market participation. This paper accounts for another step towards the understanding of gender differences as something to be targeted and diminished for the maximization of productivity. By delimiting the drivers of UDW, governments can propose economic and social policies that strive to narrow the gap between women and men and the number of hours that are dedicated to UDW inside households.

The results of the statistical analysis proved the hypothesis cited above to be true, seeing that the coefficient of gender had the biggest effect over the amount of time spent in UDW-related activities. Furthermore, the gender-separated analysis demonstrated the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work inside the household between husband and wife. Apart from gender and civil status, we found that the age of the individuals and the location of the household are also determinant factors as to the increase or decrease of hours spent weekly for UDW, although the age squared variable demonstrated that the age effect decreases with time.

2. Literature Review

Family Economics is a historical landmark in the understanding of the dynamics of production inside households and within family structures. Relatively low rates of union activity and working-class movements for women can be explained by their preoccupation with domestic activities, time limitations that men did not experience (Scott & Tilly, 1975). A

straightforward consequence of that is the sexual division of labor, defined as the division of economic and social activities between the sexes (Matthaei, 2001). With the evolution of gender equality discussions, the greater participation of women in the labor market was made possible and, with it, "tradings" between majorities and minorities (in this case, gender-related) started happening (Becker, 1981). Even with the start of this insertion, the sex-segregated labor market and sex discrimination decreased the value of unpaid work for the economy and society, even though a very substantial share of human needs are satisfied by unpaid work (Swiebel, 1999). Ignoring the relevance of UDW, we have historically undermined a necessary activity that consumes immense human resources and is not accounted for as an economic activity (Berheide et al., 1976).

Responsibilities regarding UDW, as stated above, are culturally related to the woman figure (Matthaei, 2001), which currently provides more than three times as much as men (*HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT.*, 2019). UDW englobes all productive activities outside the official labor market done by individuals for their households or others (Swiebel, 1999). The understanding and defining of UDW as a type of work activity was a milestone in academic literature and the collection of data surrounding the topic. Reaching the mainstream agenda of economics and sociology only in the nineteen sixties and seventies and being thoroughly discussed 30 years later at two United Nations conferences, the evolution of studies and attribution of importance to the topic was paramount to collect data that comprise the social and economic relevance of UDW. The improvements in measurement and data collection around women's employment and unpaid domestic labor have increased especially because of the expanding social and economic importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To measure the SDGs, surveys such as the Living Standards Measurement Studies - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA), Living Standards Measurement Studies (LSMS), Labor Force Study (LFS), and Democratic and Health Study (DHS) were used to collect data over multiple goals and indicators (Desiere & Costa, 2019). Yet, the care economy and UDW are generally left out of gender indicators, leaving gaps in the understanding of the effect over women's care responsibilities when they enter the labor market (Folbre, 2006). The lack of indicators and research understates the contribution of UDW and women to production, which is why feminist economists in the 1980s criticized labor and production statistics (*Guide on Valuing Unpaid Household Service Work*, n.d.).

With the increase in the collection of data, the understanding of this field of knowledge and family economics developed itself as a way to give basis to the structure of policies that envision gender equality. Studies vary from the gender wage gap (Herrmann & Machado,

2012), occupational gender segregation (Gedikli, 2020), and UDW (Alonso et al., 2019). From the perspective of UDW, the movement of women towards the world of paid work gave space for turning the social contract of relationships and care inside the household to paid services, such as paid child care and nursing homes (Wolfinger, 1978). Although the commercialization of domestic labor accounts for countries' Gross Domestic Product, UDW does not. The exploration of potential policies suggests that gains from UDW could amount up to 4% of GDP (Alonso et al., 2019). As a result, the redistribution, and reduction of UDW started to be seen as a macro-critical issue, and public policies that target this theme can generate large gains (Alonso et al., 2019).

To advocate for such policies, academic literature searched for concrete answers to potentialize the insertion of women in the labor market and encourage men to participate more actively in family care (Folbre, n.d.). Another important aspect is the stimulation of public support for sharing UDW, which not only can decrease the gender equality gap, but it also can generate stronger family social ties (Folbre, n.d.). Findings also determined the role of governments in investing in infrastructure, public services, and security to encourage the provision of child and elderly care by paid work, as well as applying affirmative actions to treasure gender diversity in work environments (Alonso et al., 2019). There is a growing body of research that evaluates these strategies whose objective is to expand women participation in the labor market, yet there is still a great milestone to be overcome in intervening and providing the means for a gender-diverse work environment, especially considering intersectionality of gender and race (Jacobs, 2018).

Making UDW visible through policymaking is not possible only through data collection and analysis of such. Studies surrounding subsistence production and housework and the role of women for both have contributed to the state of the art of literature and the development of the topic (Swiebel, 1999). The aforementioned study stated that imputing a monetary value to UDW is a necessary condition for giving it visibility and economic relevance. Although not being paid, *Guide on Valuing Unpaid Household Service Work* (n.d.) demonstrates how the exclusion of UDW from macroeconomic analyses, even though it produces intangible services, is problematic and undermines the economic contribution of women. Statistical evidence provided that the value of UDW is substantial to a nation's GDP, and that had household production been included, governments would have elaborated different economic and social policies (Chadeau, 1992).

Apart from determining the value of UDW for macroeconomic analysis, literature started exploring the determining factors for the increase or decrease of time spent in UDW

when relevance started to be attributed to unpaid work and gender inequality inside the household. Berheide et al (1976) gathered data that demonstrated that household work accounted for a mean of 4.5 hours per day, although the range extended up to 24 hours per day for mothers of small children. One of the factors that increased the number of hours of UDW for women in the experiment was the number of children in the household, whereas a factor that decreased the number of hours was time spent in paid work, yet not a significantly smaller *proportion* of the household work when in comparison with other family members (Berheide et al., 1976). Also, the prestige of the occupation of the husband was a determinant, whereas husbands in more prestigious occupations had wives responsible for a larger proportion of UDW (Berheide et al., 1976).

3. Method

Data used in this paper regarding unpaid work comes from the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Study Surveys – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA). The chosen dataset is from Uganda since the survey accounted for three variables: hours spent on domestic activities in the last 7 days; hours spent collecting firewood for the household, including travel time, in the last 7 days; hours spent fetching water for the household, including travel time, in the last 7 days (Desiere & Costa, 2019). Uganda is the only country in LSMS-ISA that allows for a direct measure of hours spent on domestic activities, while other countries only collect data on the time spent collecting firewood and fetching water. The dataset comes from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics' 2015 National Panel, and provides information about time usage within households, considering multiple areas such as education, health, and consumption. With the dataset from the survey, our empirical strategies evaluate the determinant variables related to unpaid domestic work considering these three outcome variables stated above.

The empirical models are estimated through Ordinary Least Square regression. Our base model is given by the following equation:

$$ln \, ln \, UDW_{im} = \beta_0 + \sum_{j=1}^{J} \beta_{jm} * HouseholdComposition_{ijm} + \phi_m + \varepsilon_{im}$$

Outcome variables (UDW) of household i in municipality m are comprised of three variables: hours spent on *domestic activities* in the last 7 days; hours spent *collecting firewood*

for the household, including travel time, in the last 7 days; hours spent *fetching water* for the household, including travel time, in the last 7 days. Our explanatory variables of interest include dummies for civil status (married coded as 1, 0 otherwise), the gender of the respondent (coded as 1 for woman and 0 for man), living in an urban location, and whether household head worked in the last 7 days. Besides, we included the household head's age as well as age squared to capture non-linearities. We also included municipality fixed effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity among different regions in Uganda. Standards errors are robust and clustered at the municipality level to account for potential correlation in the cross-section within each district. We conducted the Seemingly Unrelated Estimation (SUE) test to account for differences in coefficients between both regressions (male vs. female). The null hypothesis that these coefficients are equal amongst each other.

4. Results

Table 1 displays the results for the main determinants of unpaid domestic work. Column 1 shows the regression results concerning hours spent in domestic activities, while columns 2 and 3 depict the results for collecting firewood and fetching water, respectively. Our findings in Column 1, regarding hours spent on domestic work in the last 7 days, had positive regression coefficients for civil status, age, and gender, whereas coefficients for age squared and urban locations are negative. Having a positive effect of age in the outcome variable and a negative effect of age squared means that, as people get older, the effect of age decreases. From this data, it is possible to infer that living in urban locations proved to be a determinant of a decrease in the number of hours spent in domestic activities, whereas civil status, age, and gender increase this variable.

The behavior of the data for the outcome variable of collection of firewood, including travel time, behaved similarly: gender, civil status, and age still presented positive coefficients in column 2, and urban location and age square still have a negative relationship with the amount of time spent with this activity. As for the outcome variable of fetching water (column 3), in column three, the coefficients presented great similarity with the ones of the collection of firewood. A major difference between this last variable and the other two is that the age coefficient was negative. So, when considering patterns of time spent fetching water, both urban location and age of the subjects do not appear to be determinant factors for time usage in unpaid domestic work.

In summary, our models indicate that civil status, age, and gender are statistically valid determinants of growth in the number of hours spent in activities that compose unpaid domestic

work. It is interesting to see that civil status is a positively related coefficient, seen that although the quantity of unpaid domestic work grows, it can now be divided with someone else. Age, although being a positive coefficient, decreases its effect throughout time. This is key to understand the age range most susceptible to unpaid domestic work. Berheide et al (1976) demonstrated the effect of children in the household over the number of hours spent engaging in unpaid domestic work, which increased with the number of children in the household. With this study, added our results, we can confirm that in the early periods of life the number of hours spent in domestic activities is smaller and grow when the individual reaches adulthood. Yet, as the age squared coefficient displays, as people get older, the effect of age decreases, meaning that there is an age limit that maximized the number of hours in UDW.

Table 2 displays the results differentiating the determinants of unpaid domestic work between men and women. SUR tests suggest that coefficients in both men and women regressions are different from zero For the first two columns, variables are related to the number of hours spent in domestic activities and divided by gender. Results show that civil status when compared by gender, is positive for women and negative for men. This behavior exhibits the differences between men and women when it comes to taking responsibility for UDW activities. Whereas women increase their workload in time spent on domestic activities, men decrease their hour load. This represents the depth to which gender is a determinant of growth in UDW for women, that, although being married and having someone to divide the workload with, are responsible for more hours of engagement in UDW-related activities.

Considering that female labor force participation has increased in most countries (Ostry et al., 2018), not only are women engaged in more unpaid domestic work when married but they are also engaged in work for-profit activities. Women displayed a positive coefficient for age and a negative one for age squared, whereas men's results were the opposite, demonstrating that the effect of age in time spent for women decreases with time, whereas for men it increases. For both men and women, the relationship between household location (urban variable) has a negative coefficient. We can conclude then that living in rural households or a non-urban location is a determinant to the growth of time usage in UDW activities. The strengthening of female labor market participation in urban areas can be a determining factor in the decline of the time spent engaging in UDW related activities. Also, urban locations account for stronger commercialization of domestic labor, outsourcing such activities. The location coefficient demonstrates that the commercialization of domestic work reduces the hour load for both genders, a positive landmark since the uneven distribution of UDW can result in women not fully exploiting their productivity potential as members of the labor force (Alonso et al., 2019).

Results for columns 3 through 6 present similar results as to the first to columns. Coefficients who appeared negative and positive in the first to columns did not change, except for age and its relationship to fetching water (columns 5 and 6). It appears that as age grows, the amount of time spent fetching water decreases for both genders. What can be deduced from this is that, as age develops, the engagement of both women and men in UDW related activities decreases because of physical and health limits, which ends up making up for another section of UDW: elderly care. The commercialization of UDW already encourages the provision of child and elderly care by paid work (Alonso et al., 2019), yet it still accounts for an increase in the workload of individuals inside the age range most related to UDW.

For this study, determinants of unpaid domestic work are variables that demonstrated to have a clear relationship with the increase in hours spent on UDW-related activities. Our results show that gender, civil status, and age are determinants of increase in hours spent on domestic activities, collecting firewood and fetching water (age does not apply to this last variable). The urban household location variable stands out as a determinant for the decrease in hours spent in all three outcome variables. As for the results divided by gender, the differences that highlight between these results and the ones cited before are the ones regarding civil status. For women, being married increases the probability of having more weekly hours of UDW, whereas for married men this indicator shrinks.

Taking into consideration the literature, the findings of our study confirms previous results, especially surrounding differences in the distribution of UDW time between women and men inside a household. Alonso et al. (2019) and Berheide et al. (1976) discussed time allocation differences between men and women and provided evidence relating it to different aspects such as family income and number of children in the household, findings that can be complemented by the conclusions surrounding civil status, age and household location from this paper. Considering the literature exposed in this paper, it appears that there are no contradictions between findings in this study and the ones conducted before.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate how individual characteristics affect hours spent in unpaid domestic work activities. Findings of this research and further analysis shaped the determinants of unpaid domestic work. Our results show that civil status, age, gender, and location of the household are determinants of increase or decrease in hours spent on unpaid domestic work. More specifically, the variable for civil status demonstrated a clear difference in the distribution of workload between married women and married men,

confirming once again the gender inequality in the distribution of UDW inside the household. The age and age squared variables configured an age range that generates propensity for an increase in the number of hours spent weekly in UDW, broadly defined as the age period after receiving childcare and before eldercare. Also, individuals that live in urban environments experience a decrease in the number of weekly hour load of UDW.

From these findings, governments can propose adequate public policies that continue the insertion of women in the labor market and narrow the gap between the number of hours women and men dedicated to UDW. An example of public policy that motivates men to increase participation in UDW activities is mandatory paternity leave when a child is born. This initiative enlarges the responsibilization of men for childcare which is a large section of UDW activities. Understanding the primary determinants for an increase or decrease in UDW is paramount to the elaboration of an agenda that strives to understand this reality for different countries and the effect of more or fewer hours engaging in UDW to other aspects of the household.

Further research can focus on establishing different determinants that shape even more the characteristics of a household or individual that generates more hours of UDW. Also, it is important to understand and investigate what is the economic and social effect of having a bigger or smaller UDW workload and how balancing it inside the household between husband and wife can arouse certain effects. Another important recommendation for further research is the understanding of different types of household constitutions, such as same-sex or genderless marriages, and how this affects the distribution of unpaid domestic work.

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Tables

Table 1: Determinants of Unpaid Domestic Work (Hours Spent)

	(1) Domestic Activities	(2) Collecting Firewood	(3) Fetching Water
Civil Status	0.166***	0.0502***	0.0629***
	(0.025)	(0.014)	(0.018)
Age	0.0162***	0.00333**	-0.0203***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Age Squared	-0.000237***	-0.0000795***	0.0000951***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	1.060***	0.393***	0.382***
	(0.021)	(0.011)	(0.015)
Age	0.0140	0.0667***	0.0246
	(0.031)	(0.015)	(0.021)
urban	-0.134***	-0.274***	-0.263***
	(0.030)	(0.015)	(0.020)
_cons	0.806	-0.291***	0.588***
	(0.559)	(0.082)	(0.222)
N	11474	11474	11473
F	116.5	35.03	41.70

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01
Dependent variable: Unpaid Domestic Work
Robust Standard Errors
District Fixed-Effects

Table 2: Gender Differences in the Determinants of Unpaid Domestic Work (Hours)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Domestic Activities		Collecting Firewood		Fetching Water	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Civil Status	0.435***	-0.00488	0.132***	-0.0279*	0.192***	-0.0576**
	(0.033)	(0.039)	(0.022)	(0.015)	(0.026)	(0.024)
Age	0.0551***	-0.0363***	0.0176***	-0.0156***	-0.000999	-0.0454***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age Squared	-0.000609***	0.000309***	-0.000235***	0.000139***	-0.000113***	0.000385***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Age	-0.157***	-0.0718*	0.0698**	0.0266*	0.00622	-0.0307
	(0.048)	(0.038)	(0.032)	(0.014)	(0.037)	(0.024)
urban	-0.169***	-0.1000***	-0.388***	-0.154***	-0.334***	-0.184***
	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.029)	(0.025)
_cons	0.237	2.673***	-0.451***	0.296***	0.111	1.466***
	(0.895)	(0.515)	(0.105)	(0.049)	(0.126)	(0.303)
N	5843	5631	5843	5631	5843	5630
	.	.	.	.	.	.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01
Dependent variable: Unpaid Domestic Work
Robust Standard Errors. District Fixed-Effects
Coefficients in both men and women regressions are different from zero (SUR test)