National Bureau of Economic Research

Women, Work and the 'Second Shift': Examining the Gender Gap in Unpaid Labour in India using TUS 2019 and 2024

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the persistence of the gendered 'second shift' of paid employment and unpaid domestic work in India by analysing nationally representative Time Use Surveys from 2019 and 2024. Our analysis employs a multi-method approach, integrating descriptive statistics, OLS regressions, and a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition to dissect the drivers of change over this five-year period. While aggregate data shows a narrowing gender gap in total unpaid work, a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition reveals this change is superficial. The reduction is driven primarily by compositional shifts and pandemic-induced adjustments to occasional tasks, not by a fundamental rebalancing of core, routine housework. Regression analyses confirm that the penalty for being a woman in core domestic labour, tasks like cooking and cleaning, remained primarily unchanged. The 'unexplained' gap, capturing deep-seated social norms, persists as the dominant driver of inequality, especially in rural areas. We find that self-employment, often adopted by women, acts as a coping strategy that accommodates, rather than challenges, fixed domestic burden. The findings underscore that economic participation and education alone are insufficient to dismantle the double shift. Meaningful progress requires policy and cultural shifts that directly target the unequal distribution of indispensable, daily household labour. Recognising and redistributing unpaid work remain central to advancing inclusive labour market policies in India.

Keywords: Unpaid Domestic Work, Gender Inequality, Double Burden, Time Use Survey of India, Core Household work.

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1 Introduction

Albeit India's expeditious economic growth in the last two decades, the gender gap in economic participation remains stubbornly wide. A country with favourable demographic dividend in conjunction with increasing literacy rates and declining fertility rates, reports less than one- third of its women participating in the labour market (PLFS,2022). Existing literature builds explanation to this puzzle ranging from demand-side to supply-side and build on different datasets. Supply-side constraints are not just education, income effect, fertility rate (Klasen, & Pieters,2015; Afridi, Dinkelman, & Mahajan,2018) but also social norms (Jayachandran S, 2020) that works with conjunction with other constraints to restrict women entry into the labour market. Other studies (Lahoti & Swaminathan,2013; Kapsos et al.,2014; Klasen, & Pieters,2015; Afridi, Dinkelman, & Mahajan,2018; Deshpande & Singh,2021) highlights issues like mechanization of agriculture, without substantial increase in non-farm jobs, and structural change with absence of much paid employment as few demand-side driven issues that impedes female labour force participation rates. At the root of the above two sets of explanations, lies a common prevailing norm of unequal burden of domestic work and childcare (Deb A, 2021; Li, N,2023; Sahu, D,2024). It not just abstains women from entering a job but could also be held blameworthy of women's overrepresentation in the informal market. Given that time is a limited resource and there exists a trade-off between paid and unpaid work, woman who bears disproportionately higher burden of unpaid domestic work in India, often opt for flexible job market, marked by multiple entry, exits and re-entries and where skilling and upskilling and reskilling doesn't come their way. Hence, we see more than 90 percent of women in the informal economy and largely in self-employed jobs.

Self-employment has emerged as the largest source of jobs in India over the past six years, with the workforce in this category rising from 23.9 crore in FY18 to 35.8 crore in FY24 (HSBC, 2025). This increase has coincided with a surge in the labour force participation rate (LFPR), which rose from 53 per cent in 2018 to 64.3 per cent in 2024 among working age individuals. The expanding role of self-employment highlights the changing structure of the Indian labour market, where individuals increasingly balance paid work with domestic responsibilities. The latest Global Gender Gap Index report of 2025 ranks India 131st among 148 countries in 2025, with a low score of 64.1per cent, driven by stagnant economic participation (41.7per cent), unequal income (only 29.9per cent parity), and declining political representation (female MPs at 13.8 per cent). Issues are further accentuated, when paired with underreported unpaid work, where women spend over

seven times more time on domestic labour. These figures reflect persistent structural and social barriers that influence women's time allocation between paid and unpaid work.

Existing studies have largely utilised the cross-section data from nationally representative India's National Sample Survey (NSS) and Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS), few have also been done using panel data from the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) and Consumer Pyramid Household Survey (CPHS). However, the biggest limitation in the estimation of women's work using these datasets is the restrictive definition of work, failing to recognise the unpaid work of women as legitimate work, and leading to systematic underrepresentation women's work. One of the key issues is the misclassification and overlap of activity codes in NSS, which frequently underreport women's contributions to the economy, particularly in unpaid and informal sectors. For instance, many women engaged in unpaid labour within family-run enterprises (e.g., farming or household shops) are classified as domestic workers (Code 92) rather than as unpaid family workers (Code 21), leading to underreporting of women's economic activities (Hirway.I,2017; Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Ghosh,2020; Sahu.D,2024). Additionally, activities that are economically productive, such as fuelwood collection, sewing, and weaving for household use (Code 93), are often categorized as domestic duties and excluded from the paid employment, further diminishing the visibility of women's work (Eswaran, Ramaswami, & Wadhwa, 2013). Moreover, the NSSO includes broad residual categories like 'others' (Code 97), which lumps marginalized but economically active women (e.g., beggars or sex workers) into a non-work category, reflecting moral biases rather than an accurate economic classification (Hirway & Jose, 2011). Women involved in home-based economic activities, such as livestock care or home-based manufacturing, are similarly not recognized as workers, further exacerbating the invisibility of their economic contributions. This issue is compounded by self-employment misclassifications, where women managing home businesses are not categorized as employers or own-account workers (Code 11 or 12), likely due to gender biases in household reporting or assumptions made by surveyors (Desai & Joshi, 2019). Seasonal and irregular work patterns also contribute to misclassification, as these are often difficult to capture during short reference periods, such as the weekly or annual recall periods in the NSSO survey (Deshpande & Kabeer, 2024). Given these anomalies, the Time Use Survey (TUS) offers a critical methodological tool for capturing a more accurate and inclusive picture of women's labour. Unlike the NSSO, which relies on broad categories and may overlook substantial segments of women's work, the TUS records every activity performed in a 24-hour period, whether paid, unpaid, formal, informal, or subsistence work. This enables to capture of activities such as fuel collection, kitchen gardening, and home-based production, which are often

overlooked in traditional employment surveys (Hirway, 2017). The TUS provides a gender-sensitive perspective on time allocation, revealing how women juggle multiple roles- paid work, unpaid domestic care, subsistence labour, and personal care- and the time poverty they experience despite not being classified as "employed" under NSSO definitions (Hirway & Jose, 2011). This makes TUS an essential tool for understanding the hidden economic contributions of women, particularly in the informal and care economies, and highlights the double burden of domestic and economic responsibilities that women often bear (Deshpande et al., 2019).

Under this backdrop, this study investigates gender differences in unpaid work among rural and urban men and women aged 25-59 years, before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, using nationally representative time use data 2019 and 2024. The analysis aims to disentangle whether changes in men's participation reflect behavioural shifts or are primarily explained by population composition, shedding light on the potential redefinition of gendered norms in domestic labour in contemporary India.

2 Data, Measures and Analytic Strategies

We draw on nationally representative data from the Time Use survey (TUS) 2019 and 2024 to measure the time dispositions by the population on different activities. TUS 2019 have been conducted by the National statistical Office (NSO) during the period January 2019 to December 2019. The information on time use was collected covering a period of 24 hours starting from 4:00 AM on the day before the date of interview to 4:00 AM on the day of interview. This reference period of 24 hours was split into 48 time slots, each duration of 30 minutes. The survey covers 1,38,799 households, out of which 82,897 are rural households and remaining 55,902 are urban households. The information on time use was collected from each member of age 6 years, and above which made the unit-level data up to 4,47,250 persons (rural: 2,73,195 and urban: 1,74,055). But our total sample size at individual level is 4,45,299 as the information on time use are missing for 1,951 individuals.

The Time Use Survey TUS 2024 was the second all-India survey on time use, conducted from January to December 2024, with data collected through the computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method. The survey covered 1,39,487 households, with 83,247 in rural areas and 56,240 in urban areas and included data from 4,54,192 individuals aged 6 and above, including males, females, and transgender individuals. Like the 2019 survey, the reference period was a 24-hour window, divided into 30-minute time slots, during which activities lasting at least 10 minutes

were recorded. Maximum of three activities lasting 10 minutes were recorded in each slot chronologically based on major time criteria. So, time slots could be classified as (a) having single activity and (b) having multiple activities (which can be simultaneous if it overlaps). For analytical clarity, this study focuses on the 'major' activity reported in each time slot. The activities reported by the respondents follow a 3-digit code under the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics 2016 (ICATUS 2016). The analysis focuses on individuals aged 25 to 59 years. For women aged 25 and below, education plays a significant role in shaping how they allocate their time. In younger women, time spent in school or higher education can have a substantial impact on the time available for paid or unpaid work. By focusing on women aged 25-59, you reduce the influence of schooling, as by this age, most women have completed their formal education or are in the workforce. Another reason for the 25-59 age range is to control the effects of delayed marriage and childbearing, which can vary significantly across age groups. While younger women, under 25, may still be in the process of completing their education, getting married, or starting families, women aged 25-59 are more likely to be settled in these aspects of life (Li.N,2023). The 25-59 age range typically represents the prime working years for most women. It is also important to note that for our study, we capture time in minutes per day, which is 1440 minutes (24 hours).

2.1 Measures

Going in line with feminist labour economics literature, unpaid domestic work is a critical yet undervalued component of women's total labour burden, reinforcing the 'double burden' or the 'second shift' of household and market responsibilities. In this paper, we focus primarily on core housework, occasional housework, and total unpaid work, while excluding childcare and shopping at this stage of the analysis. This analytical delineation is guided by both theoretical and empirical considerations. core household tasks such as cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, laundry, and ironing, constitute the most routine and time-intensive segment of unpaid domestic labour. Occasional household tasks, such as repairs, outdoor chores, garden and animal care, and household bills, on the other hand are not frequent routine task but equally essential for functioning of the household. By separating these, we can discern whether shifts in labour patterns affect routine versus non-routine domains differently.

We intentionally exclude childcare and shopping from this primary analysis for reasons of methodological precision. Childcare being intensely dependent on marital status of men and women, intra-household bargaining, and the age distribution of children. Milkie et al (2025)

studied childcare for married parents. Its inclusion could obscure the specific patterns related to the more fixed expectations of core domestic maintenance. Similarly, shopping, particularly in the post-COVID context of heavy digitalization and online consumption presents measurement challenges that differ from traditional in-person shopping, complicating longitudinal comparison. Therefore, we treat childcare and shopping as separate analytical modules to be integrated in subsequent extensions, allowing this study to first establish a clear baseline understanding of the gendered dynamics in core and occasional housework. However, we present all the categories under descriptive statistics. Our approach to coding the core and the occasional household work is inspired by existing studies (Milkie et al, 2025; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel,2020).

Table 1 presents the construction of Core, occasional and total household work, using three-digit ICATUS 2016. We also present total unpaid activity.

To calculate the average time spent on each activity across entire population including both participants and non-participants. We have used the 'per person' definition for our analysis.

$$Average\ time\ spent\ per\ person\ in\ activity\ 'A' = \frac{Total\ time\ spent\ by\ the\ participants\ in\ activity\ 'A'}{Total\ number\ of\ persons}$$

2.2 Analytic Strategies

We conducted the analysis in three parts. First, we calculated the average or mean minutes per day on various paid and unpaid work categories, presenting a descriptive macro picture of two-time periods, 2019 and 2024. Following this, we also present specific activities in detail and based on individual characteristics. Second, we conducted a ordinary least square (OLS) regression to test the factors that determine unpaid work, core, occasional, and total household work. And third we assess how much of the changes in the domestic and unpaid work categories by gender, between 2019 and 2024, that is pre and post COVID 19, could be explained by the population composition shift and by other socio-economic factors versus remained explained factors, suggesting normative changes. We did this using a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition analysis of the change in housework minutes for the years 2019 and 2024. We used Stata's Oaxaca command. The method separates the total observed change into two components. The 'explained' component quantifies how much of the change is attributable to shifts in population characteristics, such as rising educational attainment or increased labour force participation among women. The 'unexplained' component

captures the residual change, which reflects shifts in behavioural norms, social norms, cultural rigidities.

3 Descriptive Statistics

3.1 Average time spent on broad ICATUS categories (paid and unpaid work)

Table 2 presents that between 2019 and 2024, patterns of time use in India across rural, urban, and combined populations reveal significant shifts, especially in women's economic participation and the balance between paid and unpaid work. At first glance, it seems encouraging to see that women's time spent on employment and related activities increased by 14 minutes between 2019 and 2024. But a close comparison with men revealed a persisting gender gap over the quinquennium. In 2019, men worked 319 minutes more than women, which in 2024 widened to 327 minutes (Deshpande & Kabeer,2020). This was mainly pronounced in the rural areas due to intertwined socio- cultural and economic reasons. However, it was interesting to note that time spent on employment and related activities was reported high in rural areas compared to urban. The type of work women engages in contributes significantly to this rural-urban differentiation (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020). Rural women more likely engage into agricultural or home-based activity, which are often informal and flexible. In contrast, urban women face barriers such as skill mismatch as jobs are of more formal nature which lacks flexibility in work timing. Another striking feature is that unpaid domestic services and caregiving responsibilities remained heavily feminized, despite minor reductions. These reductions points towards the greater use of kitchen gadgets and home appliances that helped ease the domestic burden. Also, the penetration of online food delivery app between 2019 and 2024, especially in the wake of Covid-19.

3.2 High Unpaid work despite Paid work

One critical aspect that the time use pattern reveal is that women allocate substantial time to unpaid domestic work irrespective of their engagement in different forms of paid employment (fig 1). The figure titled "Women, Work and Burden of Unpaid Work" vividly captures the persistent and deep-seated gender asymmetry in the distribution of unpaid work across employment statuses and over time. Across all categories - self-employed, regular salaried, casual labour, and unemployed, women consistently devote far more time to unpaid domestic and care responsibilities than men. For instance, in 2019, self-employed women spent 373 minutes on unpaid work compared to 116 minutes for men, and even by 2024, despite slight reductions, the disparity remains striking. The

gap is especially pronounced among women who are self-employed within household premises, where unpaid work exceeds 400 minutes per day, suggesting that home-based employment blurs the boundary between paid and unpaid labour. This imbalance persists even among regular salaried and casual workers, indicating that paid employment does not shield women from the disproportionate burden of domestic duties. Such patterns reveal that women's economic engagement coexists with a "double burden"- a heavy load of unpaid responsibilities alongside paid work. These outcomes are not merely reflections of individual choices but are deeply rooted in institutional structures, both formal and informal, that sustain gendered divisions of labour. At the household level, entrenched patriarchal norms continue to define women as primary caregivers, reinforcing expectations that domestic and care work are their natural obligations. Labour market institutions, meanwhile, remain largely indifferent to the unpaid care economy; the absence of family-friendly work arrangements, flexible hours, and accessible childcare compels many women to choose home-based or informal work that accommodates family needs but offers little security or income growth. State institutions, through limited public investment in childcare, eldercare, and social infrastructure, further shift the care burden from the public to the private sphere, disproportionately onto women. Moreover, the continued exclusion of unpaid work from national income accounts and labour force statistics renders it economically invisible, perpetuating its undervaluation. Together, these institutional dynamics create what scholars describe as a care deficit and gendered time poverty, wherein women's time becomes the hidden subsidy sustaining both households and economies. Thus, the chart illustrates not just a gender gap in unpaid work, but a systemic failure of institutions to redistribute care responsibilities and recognize women's labour as integral to development.

3.3 Educational Attainment and Unpaid Work

In this section (fig 2), we examine the time spent on work across different levels of education by gender, sector, and age group (25-59 years) for the years 2019 and 2024, to uncover how educational attainment interacts with gender and location (rural-urban) in shaping patterns of paid and unpaid work. The purpose of this analysis is to understand whether rising education levels, often viewed as a key driver of women's economic empowerment, have been translated into more equitable participation in paid employment or a reduction in the burden of unpaid work. By comparing two rounds of Time Use Surveys (2019 and 2024), this section traces both continuity and change in gendered time allocation, offering insights into the institutional and structural constraints that shape how education influences labour market and household dynamics. We

observe that the relationship between education and paid work for women follows a U- shaped pattern in both rural and urban areas, and across both age groups (15-59 and 25-59 years). However, this U-shape is more pronounced and consistent among urban women. This means that women with low and high levels of education are more likely to engage in paid work, while those with moderate education are less likely to participate in the labour market. In contrast, no such pattern is observed for men, whose participation in paid work remains relatively stable or even increases steadily with education. This gender difference may be due to several factors: for women, moderate education often leads to aspirations for better job quality, but when suitable opportunities are lacking, especially in semi-formal sectors-many choose to stay out of the labour force (Deshpande & Singh,2021). Additionally, social norms and household responsibilities may discourage market work among moderately educated women. For men, however, economic pressure and social expectations to earn remain strong across all education levels, resulting in higher and more stable labour force participation. Overall, the figure underscores a dual inequality. While education enhances men's economic participation, women's educational gains do not translate into time reallocation toward paid activities. The shape of these curves points to deep institutional asymmetries, embedded within labour markets, family structures, and policy frameworks that continue to reinforce women's time poverty and underutilization of human capital despite educational progress.

4 Regression Analyses

Determinants of Housework time

Having established the above picture of disproportionate burden of unpaid workload on women, we next employ a regression framework. We perform OLS regression analyses that predict total unpaid and total core household and occasional housework time. The description of the variables is provided in table A1. Table A2, provides the determinants of unpaid work. The immense, sudden shock of the pandemic fundamentally altered the landscape of unpaid work between 2019 and 2024. Gender was the most important factor in 2019 and being a woman meant doing about 4 more hours of unpaid work daily. But in 2024, employment status became the main driver. If one had *a* paid job (self-employed, salaried, or casual labour), it means 3 to 3.5 fewer hours of housework per day compared to the unemployed. However, being a woman still meant more housework. Other important determinants were marriage, age, rural-urban divide. This was the result of the broad classification of total unpaid time over five years of time. However, when we look at the three digit

classification, core household work determinants (table A3), the picture is quite different. Unlike the Total Unpaid Work gap, the Core Housework gap did not narrow. The 205 minutes of gender penalty was the immovable base of the double burden. Core housework is tied to the social identity of women being a homemaker. The pandemic didn't change who society sees as primarily responsible for feeding the family and cleaning the home. This is why the Female coefficient remained high both in 2019 and 2024. The pandemic had almost no effect on the deeply ingrained, gendered division of the most routine and essential domestic labour. The overall numbers improved slightly, but the foundation of gender inequality, the expectation that women manage the daily, invisible work of the home, remained perfectly intact. Other important factors included education. Mid-level education (Primary to Secondary) was found to be linked to *more* core work, while a university degree **(**Graduation & above**)** showed less participation. Hence, educated advantage persisted. Also, it was found that core work peaked in the middle age group of 35-44 years, mainly because of younger kids. But as moving to older age, it reduced. The most important finding was that all jobs reduced core work, but self-employment reduces it the least, meaning that being self-employed, women shuffle between paid and unpaid work, mainly core work. In short, we see that while the broader landscape of total work was reshuffled by the pandemic, the rigid, daily reality of who does the cooking and cleaning in India did not budge.

4.1 Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition

Following Oaxaca-blinder technique, the unpaid work and other chores can be decomposed by gender as follows:

$$\Delta \bar{Y} = \underbrace{(\bar{X}_{2024} - \bar{X}_{2019})' \hat{\beta}_{2019}}_{\text{Explained Component}} + \underbrace{\bar{X}'_{2019}(\hat{\beta}_{2024} - \hat{\beta}_{2019})}_{\text{Unexplained Component}} + \text{Interaction}$$

$(\bar{X})$ denotes the changes in the explanatory variables, while β, captures behavioural coefficients. The 'explained' component quantifies how much of the change is attributable to shifts in population characteristics, such as rising educational attainment or increased labour force participation among women. The 'unexplained' component captures the residual change, which reflects shifts in behavioural norms, social norms, cultural rigidities.

4.1A. All India (Rural + Urban)

The decomposition results (Table 3) show a substantial gender gap in unpaid work in both 2019 and 2024, with women consistently spending far more time than men. In 2019, men reported an average of 84.3 minutes per day on unpaid work, compared to 419.8 minutes among women,

yielding a statistically significant gap of -335.5 minutes (women minus men). The decomposition reveals that -104.0 minutes of this gap can be attributed to explained factors such as differences in education, marital status, age, and employment status between men and women, while the remaining -316.6 minutes is unexplained, reflecting gender norms, social expectations, and unequal intra-household bargaining power rather than observable characteristics. By 2024, the gender gap in unpaid work persisted but narrowed considerably. Men spent 19.6 minutes per day on unpaid work, while women spent 249.4 minutes, resulting in a difference of -229.7 minutes. Interestingly, the decomposition shows that the reduction in the gap was driven primarily by explained factors, -194.5 minutes, suggesting that rising female education levels, increased labour market participation, and shifts in household structure have contributed to convergence. However, the unexplained component remains large and statistically significant (-117.9 minutes), indicating that deep-rooted behavioural and cultural norms continue to shape the unequal distribution of unpaid work.

Core household work shows the starkest gender divide. In 2019, men spent 9.1 minutes per day on core tasks (such as cooking, cleaning, laundry), while women spent 304.2 minutes, resulting in a massive and highly significant gap of -295.2 minutes. The decomposition indicates that (-93.5 minutes) of the gap can be explained by observable socioeconomic characteristics-including differences in marital status, employment status, and age. However, the remaining (-270.6 minutes) of the gap was unexplained, suggesting that the dominant drivers of inequality are gender norms and structural expectations that designate core domestic work as women's responsibility. By 2024, the gender gap in core household work persists at almost the same magnitude with a difference of -292.6 minutes. This pattern indicates that despite improvements in women's socioeconomic characteristics, deeply rooted cultural norms governing routine domestic chores remain largely unchanged. In short, there is almost no behavioural convergence between men and women in core domestic tasks.

A different pattern emerges for occasional household tasks. In 2019, men performed 10.2 minutes of occasional work, while women spent 23.8 minutes, resulting in a smaller gender gap of -13.6 minutes. Of this difference, -8.2 minutes is explained by observable factors, while -10.5 minutes remains unexplained. This indicates that both structural characteristics and gender norms contribute to the inequality, but norms are relatively less dominant compared to core tasks. In 2024, occasional household work shows signs of partial convergence. The gender gap declines to -11.1 minutes, with men spending 5.3 minutes and women 16.4 minutes. Importantly, the explained

component becomes slightly smaller in proportion, signalling that both structural and attitudinal shifts are narrowing the gap. It suggests that men's participation in occasional tasks is rising faster than in core domestic chores.

4.1B. Urban India

The decomposition results (table 4) reveal very large gender gap in total unpaid work in 2019 even within urban households. Urban men spent 46.9 minutes per day on unpaid work, compared with 393.5 minutes among women, leading to a substantial and highly significant gap of -346.6 minutes. Around 62 per cent of the gap (-307.9 minutes) remained unexplained. Despite higher female education and labour market integration in urban areas, the unpaid work burden on women remained extremely high. By 2024, total unpaid work in urban areas shows a reduction in the gender gap, but inequality continues to be substantial. Men's unpaid work declines to 11.8 minutes, while women's unpaid work falls to 250.4 minutes, resulting in a gap of -238.5 minutes. The unexplained part reduces to -20.9 minutes, suggesting reducing explanatory power of gender norms in unpaid work in urban areas.

Core unpaid work forms the largest share of gender disparity in urban India as well. There is Very little reduction in gap (294.4 to 290.1 minutes). Explained component remained stable, meaning structural reasons did not improve (men's time allocation patterns did not adjust to increasing female employment). While the unexplained penalty remains high, implying persistent gender norms around core work.

For the Occasional task Both the gap and the discrimination component declined, moving towards more equal division. Men were found to be more likely to participate in occasional tasks than in core household tasks. Hence, Urban India shows progress in sharing occasional and overall unpaid work, but the gendered burden of core household work remains almost fully intact.

4.1C Rural India

Table 5 reveals, that in 2019 rural men averaged 109.9 minutes/day of unpaid work while rural women averaged 437.1 minutes/day, so the gender gap was -327.2 minutes. Of this about -89.3 minutes of the gap are explained by observable characteristics, while -320.8 minutes are recorded as unexplained. By 2024 these fell and the gap narrowed to -223.8 minutes, and the explained component grows substantially to -181.9 minutes, while the unexplained component declines to -114.4 minutes. In rural India the gender gap in unpaid work is very large in both 2019 and 2024. women perform many more minutes of unpaid and household work per day than men. Though the

overall gap in total unpaid work narrowed, but the decomposition shows that most of the persistent gap in core household tasks is driven by unexplained factors.

Core household tasks remain overwhelmingly feminized in rural India. Very little of the core-task gap has closed between 2019 and 2024. The large unexplained component (**-270.7** minutes in 2019 and -267.95 minutes in 2024) points to stable gender norms around daily domestic responsibilities. Even as some compositional changes occur, they are insufficient to alter who does the bulk of routine housework.

Occasional tasks show a smaller gender gap to begin with and do show modest movement toward convergence. A substantial portion of the occasional-task gap is explained by observable characteristics (larger than for core tasks), and both the explained and unexplained parts decline a bit by 2024. This suggests that men are somewhat more likely than before to take up occasional tasks or that women are reducing time on these tasks due to other time pressures. Men are more willing or able to take on flexible, non-routine tasks, but this does not translate into equal sharing of daily, time-intensive core chores.

5 Discussion and Implications

The findings of both descriptive and empirical analysis, highlight a clear and persistent gender imbalance in the distribution of unpaid domestic work. Women continue to shoulder the largest share of core household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, while also contributing significantly to occasional activities like repairs, maintenance and outdoor chores. Even when women participate in paid employment, their responsibilities at home do not decrease proportionately. This reinforces the ‘double burden’ of managing both market and household roles, limiting their time and flexibility for skill enhancement, leisure and rest. The results also suggest that unpaid domestic labour is not a marginal component but a substantial and systematic part of women’s total workload. Men’s participation in routine domestic tasks remains limited and concentrated more toward occasional activities that do not require day-to-day commitment. These patterns reflect deep-rooted social expectations and gender norms that continue to shape behaviour within households. By isolating core and occasional household labour, the study clearly demonstrates that unpaid domestic work is an important mechanism through which gender inequality persists in the labour market as well as within families.

The evidence points toward a need for policies that reduce women's unpaid workload and promote a more equitable distribution of housework. Formal institutions such as education systems, labour policies, and employment programs, have expanded women's access to paid work but remain limited in capacity to address the unpaid economy. Policies designed to promote female labour force participation have often operated in isolation from social care and infrastructure systems, thereby failing to redistribute domestic work equitably. Informal institutions, deeply entrenched social norms, gendered expectations, and patriarchal family structures, continue to reinforce women's primary responsibility for household management, constraining their full participation in productive employment. Thus, institutional weakness on both fronts- formal inefficiencies and informal rigidity, creates a dual constraint on women's economic agency. Expanding access to time-saving public services, such as community kitchens, laundry services, household maintenance assistance, and affordable domestic help, can ease the pressure of routine household responsibilities on women. Awareness campaigns and school-based programmes that challenge traditional gender norms can gradually shift household behaviour and encourage men's involvement in everyday domestic work. Workplaces can also contribute by adopting family-friendly measures such as flexible working hours and remote-work options for both men and women, rather than assuming caregiving as a woman's responsibility. Importantly, recognising unpaid work in national statistics and policy design, would help make women's contribution to the economy more visible. Together, these interventions can help reduce the disproportional domestic burden on women, support their participation in paid employment, and move households toward a fairer sharing of responsibilities. The goal should not only be to increase women's participation in paid work but to build institutional capacity both formal and informal to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid work. This integrated institutional approach will ensure that women are supported both at work and at home, transforming the 'second shift' from a symbol of constraint into a marker of inclusive and prosperous labour market transformation in India.

6 Conclusion

Using the nationally representative Time Use Survey, this study examined gender differences in unpaid domestic work with a focus on three key categories: core household tasks, occasional household activities, and total unpaid domestic labour. By separating core and occasional domestic tasks and excluding childcare and shopping at this stage, the analysis provides a clearer view of routine household responsibilities that most directly contribute to the everyday domestic burden.

The empirical patterns point to a persistent and substantial imbalance. Women perform most unpaid domestic tasks, particularly in the core category where work is daily, time-consuming, and non-negotiable for household functioning. Even when women engage in paid employment, their unpaid duties at home remain largely unchanged. In contrast, men's contributions are limited and concentrated more on occasional tasks that do not require daily time commitment. These findings emphasise that unpaid domestic work continues to play a central role in shaping gender inequality, both in terms of labour allocation inside the home and women's opportunities in the labour market.

Recent data showing a smaller unpaid work gap is misleading. The improvement is superficial, as the essential, daily chores at the heart of domestic life remain almost unchanged and unfairly distributed on women. The pandemic reshuffled occasional duties and altered aggregate time use, but it could not bring many changes in the core household duties that mostly women shoulders. This stasis is not due to a lack of change in women's characteristics, education or labour force participation. Rather, it stems from the failure of social norms, household bargaining dynamics, and institutional support systems to evolve in tandem. The 'unexplained' component of the decomposition, capturing discrimination and deep-seated norms remains the dominant explanation for the gap in core work, especially in rural areas. Our findings challenge the assumption that economic development and educational attainment will automatically translate into a more equitable division of labour at home. They underscore that the double shift is not a private trouble, but a public issue sustained by institutional failures.

This study is not without its limitations, which also point toward promising avenues for future research. First, our analytical focus on the single 'major activity' within each time slot necessarily provides a simplified approach and might result in an underestimation of the total cognitive and physical burden of unpaid work, as it cannot capture the simultaneous multi-tasking, such as supervising children while preparing meals, that disproportionately falls on women. Second, the cross-sectional design of the Time Use Survey data allows us to identify robust associations but constrains our ability to establish or trace how life-course events reshape time allocation within households. Finally, by design, this analysis has excluded the critical domains of childcare and shopping to isolate the mechanisms of routine domestic maintenance. Acknowledging these tasks as distinct but central pillars of unpaid labour is crucial. Future work must integrate them, either as separate modules or within an expanded definition of total work, to fully comprehend how caregiving and household provisioning entrench or alleviate the gendered 'double shift.'

These limitations, however, do not diminish the core contribution of this paper that the persistent, unexplained penalty in core housework, the immovable floor beneath the double shift demands a research and policy agenda that moves beyond counting minutes to challenging the norms and structures that dictate whose minutes they are.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no known financial or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research reported in this paper.

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Figures and Tables

Table 1: Constructed work categories, TUS 2019 and 2024

Category	Classification	Description
Unpaid Work	Unpaid/Paid status of the activity (not for payment)	care for care for children, sick, elderly, differently-abled persons in own households (02), production of other services (except care activities as covered in code 02) for own consumption (03), production of goods for own consumption (04), voluntary work for production of goods in households (05), voluntary work for production of services in households (06), voluntary work for production of goods in market/non-market units (07),voluntary work for production of services in market/non-market units (08), unpaid trainee work for production of goods (09), unpaid trainee work for production of services (10), other unpaid work for production of goods (11), other unpaid work for production of services (12)
Core Household Work	ICATUS 2016	preparing meals/snacks (311), Serving meals/snacks (312), cleaning up after food preparation/meals/snacks (313), Storing, arranging, preserving food stocks (314), other activities related to food and meals management and preparation (319), Indoor cleaning (321), Hand/machine-washing (341), Drying, hanging out, bringing in wash (342), Ironing, pressing and folding (343), Mending or repairing and care of clothes and shoes; cleaning and polishing shoes (344), other activities related to care of textiles and footwear (349)
Occasional Household Work	ICATUS 2016	Outdoor cleaning (322),Recycling and disposal of garbage (323), Upkeep of indoor/outdoor plants, hedges, garden, grounds, landscape, etc.(324), Tending furnace, boiler, fireplace for heating and water supply (325), Other activities related to cleaning and upkeep of dwelling and surroundings (329), Do-it-yourself improvements, maintenance and repair of own dwelling (331), Installation, servicing and repair of personal and household goods including ICT equipment (332), Vehicle maintenance and repairs (333), Other activities related to do-it-yourself decoration, maintenance and repair (339),Paying household bills (351), Budgeting, planning, organizing duties and activities in the household (352), Other activities related to household management (359), Daily pet care (361), Using veterinary care or other pet care services (362), Other activities related to pet care (369)
Total Household Work	ICATUS 2016	**Core Household Work + Occasional Household Work**

Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024 and ICATUS 2016

Table 2: Changes in the average time spent per day (minutes) on paid and unpaid work by gender and sector and for the age group 25-59 years

	2019			2024		
Major Divisions of ICATUS Activity	Male	female	person	Male	female	person
Employment and related activities	381	92	234	412	106	255
Production of goods for own final use	53	42	47	32	38	35
Unpaid domestic services for household members	35	343	191	29	327	182
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	15	46	31	21	60	41
Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work	3	2	3	1	1	1
Learning	4	2	3	4	2	3
Socializing and communication, community participation and religious practice	104	94	99	105	105	105
Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices	108	110	109	128	109	118
Self-care and maintenance	736	710	723	709	690	699

Urban

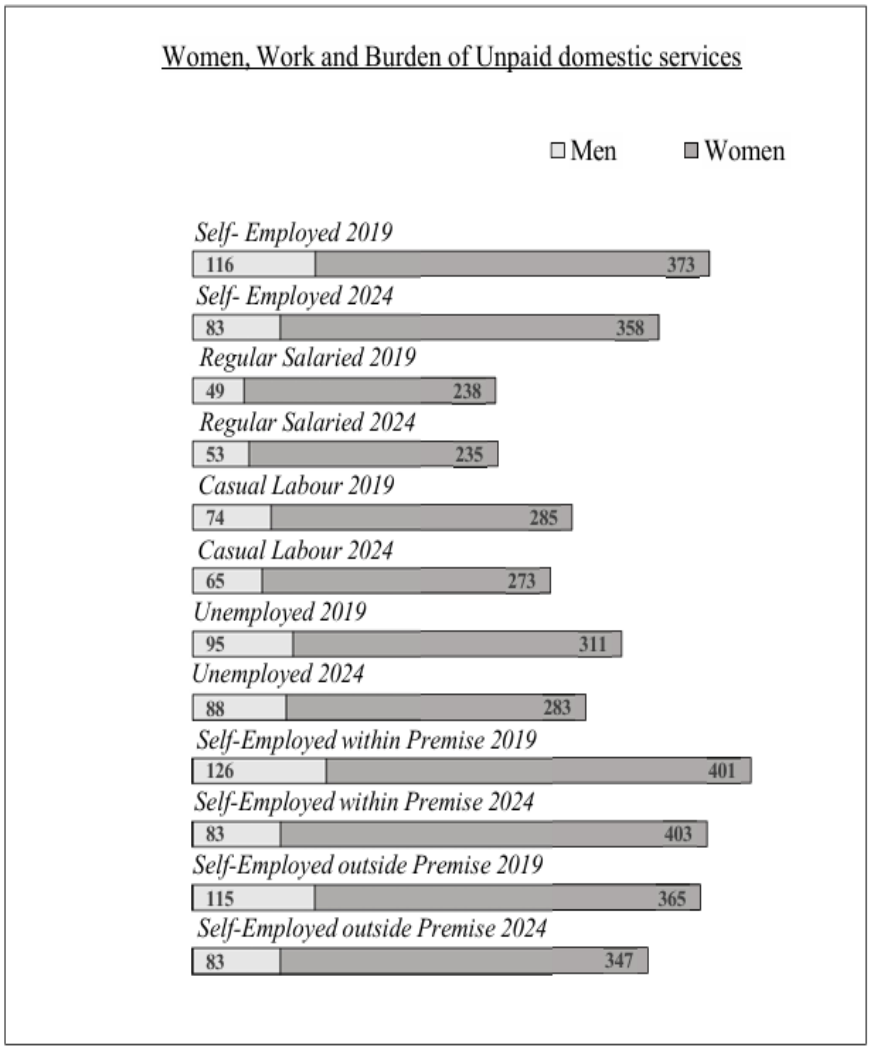
	2019			2024		
Major Divisions of ICATUS Activity	Male	female	person	Male	female	person
Employment and related activities	471	91	282	471	102	291
Production of goods for own final use	6	7	6	3	7	5
Unpaid domestic services for household members	25	330	177	29	322	172
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	14	47	30	18	61	39
Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work	3	2	3	1	1	1
Learning	9	6	7	7	5	6
Socializing and communication, community participation and religious practice	80	90	85	77	95	86
Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices	122	152	137	136	149	142
Self-care and maintenance	711	714	713	698	698	698

Rural +Urban

	2019			2024		
Major Divisions of ICATUS Activity	Male	female	person	Male	female	person
Employment and related activities	410	91	249	432	105	267
Production of goods for own final use	38	31	34	22	28	25
Unpaid domestic services for household members	32	339	187	29	326	178
Unpaid caregiving services for household members	15	46	31	20	61	40
Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work	3	2	3	1	1	1
Learning	6	3	4	5	3	4
Socializing and communication, community participation and religious practice	96	93	94	96	102	99
Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices	113	123	118	130	122	126
Self-care and maintenance	728	711	720	705	692	699
Total Minutes Spent	**1440**	**1440**	**1440**	**1440**	**1440**	**1440**

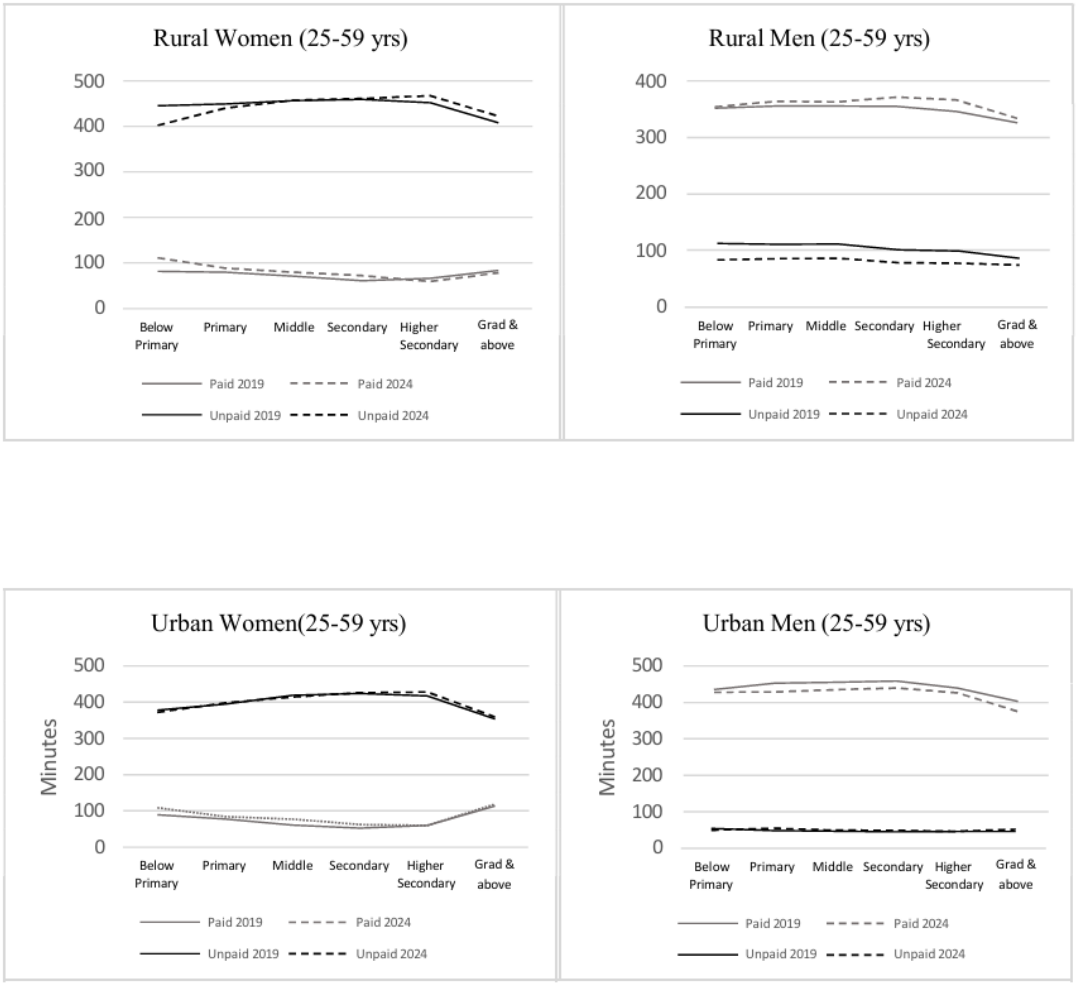
Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024

Fig 1: Changes in the average time spent per day (in minutes) to unpaid domestic work by gender, status of employment and the location of employment (for the age group 25- 59 years).



Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024

Fig 2: Time spent on work across different levels of education by gender, sector and by age group (25 to 59) years for the year 2019 and 2024



Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024

Age (25 to 59 yrs)	All		Rural		Urban	
Women (Paid work)	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024
Illiterate	100	118	99	120	105	112
Below Primary	83	110	81	111	89	108
Primary	79	87	79	88	77	84
Middle	67	79	71	79	61	77
Secondary	57	68	61	72	52	62
Higher Secondary	63	59	66	59	59	60
Grad & above	104	104	83	78	113	118
Men (Paid work)						
Illiterate	355	358	341	347	425	408
Below Primary	368	372	352	354	435	428
Primary	378	379	356	364	453	429
Middle	382	382	356	363	455	435

Secondary	391	395	356	371	459	439
Higher Secondary	384	390	346	367	439	426
Grad & above	374	358	326	334	403	375

Age (25 to 59 yrs)	All		Rural		Urban	
Women (Unpaid work)	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024
Illiterate	401	385	410	391	352	354
Below Primary	432	396	445	402	378	372
Primary	436	430	449	441	394	397
Middle	445	445	457	458	419	414
Secondary	445	448	460	461	424	426
Higher Secondary	435	450	452	468	417	428
Grad & above	370	382	408	423	354	359
Men (Unpaid work)						
Illiterate	104	85	114	92	54	55
Below Primary	101	75	112	83	55	50
Primary	97	78	110	85	49	56
Middle	94	76	111	86	48	49
Secondary	82	68	101	78	46	49
Higher Secondary	77	65	99	77	47	47
Grad & above	62	62	86	74	47	53

Table 3

Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition of changes in men and women average time (in minutes) for the year 2019 and 2024 and at all India level (Rural + Urban).

	Total unpaid work	Total Household work	Core Household work	Occasional Household work
2019				
group1-Men	84.324***	19.245***	9.051***	10.194***
	(0.479)	(0.192)	(0.143)	(0.125)
group2-Women	419.799***	328.074***	304.239***	23.835***
	(0.625)	(0.530)	(0.513)	(0.159)
Difference	-335.475***	-308.829***	-295.188***	-13.641***
	(0.788)	(0.564)	(0.533)	(0.202)
Explained	-104.042***	-101.669***	-93.471***	-8.198***
	(1.906)	(1.597)	(1.538)	(0.520)
Unexplained	-316.562***	-281.051***	-270.582***	-10.469***
	(2.512)	(1.851)	(1.649)	(0.720)
2024				
group1-Men	19.634***	14.068***	8.785***	5.283***
	(0.290)	(0.148)	(0.128)	(0.070)
group2-Women	249.355***	317.753***	301.346***	16.407***

	(0.576)	(0.491)	(0.480)	(0.114)
Difference	-229.721***	-303.685***	-292.560***	-11.125***
	(0.645)	(0.513)	(0.496)	(0.134)
Explained	-194.469***	-103.738***	-98.594***	-5.144***
	(1.170)	(1.243)	(1.211)	(0.313)
Unexplained	-117.856***	-278.507***	-270.187***	-8.320***
	(2.687)	(1.841)	(1.718)	(0.512)

Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024.
Standard errors in parentheses, * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 4

Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition of changes in men and women average time (in minutes) for the year 2019 and 2024 and for Urban India.

	Total unpaid work	Total Household work	Core Household work	Occasional Household work
2019				
group1-Men	46.912***	14.384***	10.220***	4.164***
	(0.499)	(0.272)	(0.235)	(0.124)
group2-Women	393.490***	321.751***	304.613***	17.139***
	(0.986)	(0.850)	(0.826)	(0.213)
Difference	-346.578***	-307.367***	-294.392***	-12.974***
	(1.105)	(0.893)	(0.854)	(0.247)
Explained	-131.584***	-113.838***	-107.049***	-6.789***
	(2.928)	(2.555)	(2.466)	(0.602)
Unexplained	-307.850***	-277.975***	-269.744***	-8.231***
	(3.361)	(2.693)	(2.471)	(0.884)
2024				
group1-Men	11.838***	15.229***	12.132***	3.097***
	(0.343)	(0.244)	(0.225)	(0.086)
group2-Women	250.379***	314.637***	302.250***	12.387***
	(0.854)	(0.799)	(0.780)	(0.163)
Difference	-238.540***	-299.407***	-290.118***	-9.290***
	(0.921)	(0.836)	(0.812)	(0.184)
Explained	-218.638***	-111.822***	-107.340***	-4.483***
	(1.388)	(1.976)	(1.921)	(0.431)
Unexplained	-120.851***	-277.863***	-271.712***	-6.151***
	(3.876)	(2.588)	(2.438)	(0.680)

Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024.
Standard errors in parentheses, * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 5

Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition of changes in men and women average time (in minutes) for the year 2019 and 2024 and for Rural India.

	Total unpaid work	Total Household work	Core Household work	Occasional Household work
2019				
group1-Men	109.901***	22.568***	8.252***	14.317***
	(0.708)	(0.263)	(0.178)	(0.190)
group2-Women	437.068***	332.224***	303.993***	28.231***
	(0.801)	(0.677)	(0.655)	(0.222)
Difference	-327.167***	-309.656***	-295.742***	-13.914***
	(1.067)	(0.726)	(0.679)	(0.292)
Explained	-89.269***	-93.764***	-84.578***	-9.186***
	(2.470)	(2.062)	(1.987)	(0.758)
Unexplained	-320.799***	-282.093***	-270.738***	-11.354***
	(3.677)	(2.590)	(2.255)	(1.113)
2024				
group1-Men	24.914***	13.281***	6.518***	6.763***
	(0.427)	(0.186)	(0.151)	(0.102)
group2-Women	248.718***	319.693***	300.783***	18.910***
	(0.769)	(0.622)	(0.607)	(0.154)
Difference	-223.804***	-306.412***	-294.264***	-12.148***
	(0.879)	(0.649)	(0.626)	(0.185)
Explained	-181.870***	-97.7188***	-92.155***	-5.564***
	(1.680)	(1.623)	(1.582)	(0.438)
Unexplained	-114.405***	-277.457***	-267.954***	-9.504***
	(3.732)	(2.615)	(2.428)	(0.748)

Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024.
Standard errors in parentheses, * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Appendix

Table A1: Description of variables of OLS regression and Oaxaca blinder

Explanatory Variables	Description
Female	The variable takes the value 1 if gender is female, 0 otherwise; base category: male
Age	The age of the person in years. We took age cohorts from 25 to 59 years, keeping 25-34 as the base category

Household size	Number of family members
Land Possessed	All the lands which are either 'owned and possessed' or 'leased-in' or 'otherwise possessed' or 'leased-out' by the households considered irrespective of its use. Area is measured in hectare
Urban	The variable takes the value 1, if place of residence is urban, 0 otherwise; base category rural
Relation to head	All relation except self was taken as reference. 1 for that relation, 0 otherwise.
Marital Status	We have four dummy variables taking value 1 and 0. currently married, Unmarried (reference category), Widowed, divorced/separated
Education Level	Four dummy variables- No schooling and below primary (reference category), , primary to secondary, higher secondary, and graduation & above
Social Group	Three dummy variables. schedules caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST), and (other backward caste (OBCs), and others) (reference category).
Employment Status	We have categorised individuals using their usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS) into five dummy variables. Self-employed, regular/wage salaried, casual worker, unemployed(reference) and not in the labour force
Religion	Hindu was our reference category.

A2: OLS Estimates of Unpaid Work

Dependent Variable: Time spent on Unpaid work	**2019**	**2024**
Explanatory Variables:		
Female	238.6***	42.67***
	(1.381)	(0.895)
Age 35-44	-22.43***	-5.480***
	(0.879)	(0.519)
Age 45-54	-48.96***	-3.256***
	(1.003)	(0.618)
Age 55-59	-69.58***	-0.396
	(1.454)	(0.968)
Rural	34.28***	10.70***
	(0.803)	(0.457)
Land possessed	2.260***	-0.485***
	(0.204)	(0.134)
Household size	-3.253***	-0.301**
	(0.229)	(0.130)
Self-employed	-14.19***	-190.5***
	(3.406)	(3.630)
Regular Salaried	-79.58***	-211.7***
	(3.349)	(3.585)

Casual Labour	-75.11***	-214.6***
	(3.431)	(3.632)
Not in labour market	84.06***	80.25***
	(3.475)	(3.664)
Primary to Secondary	1.817**	0.723
	(0.924)	(0.662)
Higher Secondary	-6.605***	-0.288
	(1.309)	(0.810)
Graduation & above	-18.93***	-5.093***
	(1.250)	(0.791)
Minorities	-4.642***	0.116
	(0.944)	(0.557)
ST	14.28***	10.25***
	(1.334)	(0.881)
SC	2.210**	0.84
	(0.945)	(0.608)
Married	90.86***	21.35***
	(1.630)	(0.967)
Widowed	38.21***	16.86***
	(2.794)	(1.6)
Divorced/Separated	43.91***	5.216*
	(4.917)	(2.684)
Relation: Self	-2.032*	1.397**
	(1.132)	(0.626)
Constant	89.14***	193.8***
	(5.238)	(4.045)
State effect Controlled	Yes	Yes
R-Square	0.6272	0.7485
No. of Observations	165576	171682

Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024.
Standard errors in parentheses, * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

A3: OLS Estimates of Core Household Work

Dependent Variable: Time spent on Core Household Work	**2019**	**2024**
Explanatory Variables:		

Female	207.4***	205.5***
	(0.970)	(0.835)
Age 35-44	3.484***	6.983***
	(0.600)	(0.538)
Age 45-54	-18.35***	-18.70***
	(0.706)	(0.661)
Age 55-59	-43.81***	-43.65***
	(1.042)	(0.987)
Rural	-0.115	-2.060***
	(0.568)	(0.542)
Land possessed	0.0499	0.520***
	(0.089)	(0.148)
Household size	-8.414***	-8.803***
	(0.170)	(0.145)
Self-employed	-21.97***	-13.60***
	(2.114)	(2.052)
Regular Salaried	-33.07***	-27.12***
	(2.109)	(2.039)
Casual Labour	-30.28***	-23.59***
	(2.135)	(2.069)
Not in labour market	79.51***	90.86***
	(2.238)	(2.170)
Primary to Secondary	9.294***	13.29***
	(0.641)	(0.649)
Higher Secondary	2.220**	7.321***
	(0.882)	(0.820)
Graduation & above	-9.291***	-4.753***
	(0.879)	(0.849)
Minorities	0.955	-1.387**
	(0.685)	(0.626)
ST	-7.362***	-10.66***
	(0.838)	(0.759)
SC	-1.057	-2.323***
	(0.661)	(0.627)
Married	53.10***	47.12***
	(1.130)	(0.985)
Widowed	12.12***	14.41***
	(2.118)	(1.839)
Divorced/Separated	20.56***	14.75***
	(3.626)	(3.229)
Relation: Self	-21.57***	-21.90***
	(0.731)	(0.612)
Constant	57.15***	50.05***

	(3.536)	(3.135)
State effect Controlled	Yes	Yes
R-Square	0.7141	0.7421
No. of Observations	165,576	171682

Source: Author's computation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024.
Standard errors in parentheses, * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.