

How Does Unpaid Care Work Affect Women's Choices and Gender Equality in the Labor Market?

Findings of the "Care, Gender and Inclusive Growth
in China" Project

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Introduction

- Unpaid care work refers to the daily and generational work of reproduction that is essential to the functioning of the economy as well as the welfare of households and individuals.
- In China, as most developing countries, the work of care is undertaken predominantly by women, and is delivered primarily within the household.
- The burden of care is one of the main constraints that restrict women's opportunities and choices.
- In most countries, unpaid care work is viewed as a natural duty of women and a private matter; it remains unrecognized in public policies.
- China is no exception in this regard, especially in the post-reform era.

- Prior to reforms, many care roles and responsibilities were socialized, enabling women to enter the labor force in large numbers and on a more equal footing with men.
- The reform era has seen the work of care largely returned to the domestic sphere.
- This reconfiguration of the care economy has important implications for the choices women are able to make between work and family; for socioeconomic inequalities, including gender inequality; for fertility, and thus the long-term demographic changes; and for the care of a rapidly aging population.
- It also has implications for the Chinese economy and sustained growth through its impact on the quality and productivity of the labour force, given the disinvestments in human capital of the next generation.

- With the support from the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC), we launched this project in January 2014.
- A total of 17 economists are participating in the project.
- The project examines the impacts of the changing roles of the state and families in care provision on gender equalities in the labour market in the context of China's ongoing institutional, structural, demographic transformations.
- The analyses pay special attention to socioeconomically disadvantaged groups – ethnic minorities, rural women, migrants mothers, and men and women in retirement or near retirement age.
- The empirical analyses use data from 10 nationally representative surveys.

- This presentation presents the main findings generated by the project.
- The presentation intends to shed light on two questions:
- (1) How do China's ongoing socioeconomic transformations reshape the institutional arrangements of care provision?
- (2) How does the changing care arrangement affect women's choices and gender equalities in the labor market?

The changes of maternity leave and childcare policies and care provision arrangements

A. Paid Maternity Leave (Jia and Dong 2016)

- In the post-reform era, a series of regulations have been adopted to protect women's reproductive role.
- The length of maternity leave was extended from 56 days prior to reform to 90 days in 1988 and to 98 days in 2012.
- However, there is no effective means of enforcing labor market regulations in informal/private sectors.
- The proportion of urban working women who took a paid maternity leave for most recent birth has declined over time.
- Much of the decline were endured by women without a college education.
- Only 25 percent of mothers employed in domestic private sectors reported having taken paid maternity leave for their most recent birth.
- The decline in average paid maternity leave duration has a strong negative effect on breastfeeding duration.

Trends in maternal employment and paid maternity leave in urban China, 1988-2008

	1988-1992	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2008
Employment rate of mothers at the time of surrounding childbirth (%)	78.9	72.3	65.7	61.3
Proportion of mothers who took paid maternity leave (%)	51.8	47.8	39.2	36.6
Duration of paid maternity leave conditional on mothers who took paid leave (day)	110	118	121	125
Proportion of employed mothers who took paid maternity leave (%)	65.6	66.1	59.6	59.8
Duration of paid maternity leave for all employed mothers (day)	68.4	74.3	68.9	70.2
Proportion of employed mothers with a college education who took paid leave (%)	90.1	94.2	87.9	91.1
Duration of paid maternity leave for employed mothers with a college education (day)	99.0	116.6	101.9	117.8
Proportion of employed mothers without a college education who took paid leave (%)	60.3	54.8	39.9	34.5
Duration of paid maternity leave for employed mothers without a college education (day)	61.8	57.3	45.9	31.7

Source: The 3rd Survey of the Chinese Women's Social Status in 2010

The effects of paid maternity leave duration on the probability of breastfeeding for at least 1, 4, 6, 9 and 12 months

	All mothers		Mothers without a collage education	
	Marginal Effects	Effects of increasing paid leave by 30 days	Marginal Effects	Effects of increasing paid leave by 30 days
Breastfeeding ≥ 1 month	0.0039*** (0.0010)	0.117***	0.0051*** (0.0007)	0.153**
Breastfeeding ≥ 4 months	0.0044*** (0.0006)	0.132***	0.0053*** (0.0005)	0.159***
Breastfeeding ≥ 6 months	0.0047*** (0.0004)	0.141***	0.0054*** (0.0003)	0.162***
Breastfeeding ≥ 9 months	0.0050*** (0.0001)	0.150***	0.0055*** (0.0002)	0.165***
Breastfeeding ≥ 12 months	0.0051*** (0.0001)	0.153***	0.0055*** (0.0001)	0.165***
Observations	4,007	4,007	3,066	3,066

Source: Jia and Dong (2016)

B. Childcare Provision

- The post-reform era witnessed a sharp decline in the support provided by the State and employers for childcare.
- Enterprise surveys in the early 2000s show that only 5 percent of enterprises provided a breastfeeding room for women employees and less than 6 percent of enterprises ran childcare programs.
- Many publicly funded childcare programs were either shut down or transformed into service-for-fee programs.
- Private childcare programs have grown rapidly to fill the gap.
- The state's withdrawal from childcare provision adversely affected rural children more than their urban counterparts.
- While 55 percent of the Chinese children lived in rural areas, rural children accounted only for 34 percent of the kindergarten enrolments in 2012.
- In both urban and rural sectors, grandparents have become main care givers for pre-school children.

Trends in kindergartens and kindergarten enrolments between 1998 and 2013

	1998	2001	2006	2010	2012	2013
China						
No. kindergartens (1,000)	181.4	111.7	130.5	150.4	181.3	198.6
% private kindergartens	17.0	39.9	57.8	68.0	68.8	67.2
No. enrolments (1,000)	17,199.6	13,982.2	13,912.5	17,003.9	19,119.1	19,700.3
% in private kindergartens	---	13.7	29.5	41.9	45.3	46.1
Urban sector						
No. kindergartens (1,000)	77.1	58.7	65.8	78.8	118.2	---
% private kindergartens	---	43.2	65.0	70.3	73.0	
No. enrolments (1,000)	---	5,610.2	6,276.8	8,746.3	12,548.4	---
% in private kindergartens	---	23.1	41.5	47.7	52.1	
Rural sector						
No. kindergartens (1,000)	104.3	53.0	64.7	71.6	63.1	---
% private kindergartens	---	28.4	50.4	58.5	60.9	
No. enrolments (1,000)	---	8,372.0	7,635.7	8,257.6	6,570.8	---
% in private kindergartens	---	7.4	19.6	26.7	32.2	
As % of total enrolments		59.9	54.9	48.6	34.4	

Notes: the figures presented in this table include both kindergartens and pre-school programs.

Source: China Education Statistical Yearbook (various issues)

Trends in care arrangements for children aged 0-6 in China (%)

	Urban Children		Rural Children		
	Daycare	Grandparents care	Daycare	Grandparents care	Grandparents as guardians
1991-1993	24.1	39.4	11.0	13.6	3.0
1997-2000	23.7	54.0	14.9	24.4	10.5
2004-2006	20.0	52.7	20.7	36.6	25.6
2009-2011	21.7	53.8	26.4	52.9	32.4
Observations	2,473	2,473	5,335	5,335	5,335

Source: China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS), compiled by Du, Dong and Zhang(2016) and Chang and Dong (2016).

C. Eldercare Provision

- Like in other developing countries, the provision of care for the elderly is primarily the responsibility of families in China.
- Consistent with the approach to childcare, the post-reform eldercare policy discourse emphasizes family responsibility and the role of markets in care provision.
- Chen, Giles and Zhao (2016) estimate that 42.9 million Chinese people aged 60 and older need instrumental care, accounting for 26.8% of the elderly women and 19.4% of the elderly men.
- 11% of the elderly needing care received no care services, and 68% of the neglected elderly were women.
- Other things being equal, the infirm elderly men are 10% more likely than the elderly women to be cared by the spouse, while the infirm elderly women are 8% more likely to be cared by adult children.
- The acceleration of rural-to-urban migration of the young and middle-aged will leave rural elderly women at a greater risk of having no one to take care of them after the spouse passes away.

Caring Pattern for the Infirm elderly in China

	All	Female	Male	Single	Married
Spouse only (%)	44.9	34.0	59.9	0.4	70.4
Child only (%)	41.0	50.3	28.2	84.3	16.1
Spouse and child (%)	5.8	5.8	5.8	0.6	8.8
Other relatives only (%)	5.7	7	3.7	10.1	3.1
Nanny only (%)	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.9
Other joint care (%)	1.9	2.3	1.7	4.3	0.7
Observations	1,428	813	615	396	1,032

Source: CHARLS 2011-2012 baseline survey from Chen et al. (2016)

Women's hard choices and gender inequalities in the labor market

1. Grandparents-provided childcare and LFP of mothers and grandparents of young children in the urban sector
 - Du, Dong and Zhang (2016) estimate that grandparents-provided childcare increases the LFP of urban mothers of preschool children by 30 percent, 6 percentage points higher than the effect of the use of daycare.
 - Zhang and Wang (2016) find that caring for grandchildren decreases the LFP of urban women aged 45-65 by 17 percent and conditional on being in the labor force, it reduces the labor supply by 8 hours per week.
 - Caring for grandchildren has no significant effect on the LFP and labor hour supply of urban men in the same age group.
 - Thus, caring for grandchildren increases the gender gap in employment for middle-aged adults.

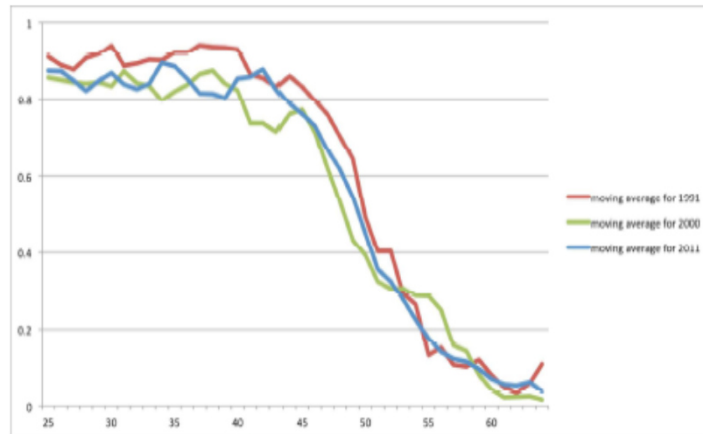


Figure 1: Labor force participation rates for urban married women aged 25-64, by age and year (4,594 observations)

Source: CHNS from Hare (2016)

2. Childcare costs and LFP and childcare utilization of migrant and local mothers in the urban sector

- Family migration has become a dominant form of rural-to-urban migration flows in recent years.
About 9 million migrant children aged 0-6 lived with their parents in cities, representing 26.3 percent of urban children in this age group.
- Migrant families' access to non-parental care is more limited than that of local families.
- The lack of affordable childcare is a main obstacle to mothers' LFP and childcare utilization.
- Song and Dong (2016) find that
 - Childcare costs have a strong negative effect on the LFP and childcare utilization of migrant and local mothers in the urban sector.
 - Compared to local mothers, the LFP and childcare utilization rates of migrant mothers are more sensitive to high childcare costs.

Childcare costs and childcare utilization and labor force participation of migrant and local mothers of children aged 0-6 in urban China

	Migrant children	Local children
Enrollment rate (%) All children	39.2	41.2
Children of working mothers	47.1	44.0
Enrolled in public childcare	39.0	65.9
Pay sponsorship fee	13.7	3.3
Childcare cost (yuan/month)	617	618
Proportion of childcare cost of household income (%)	16.5	18.0
	Migrant mothers	Local mothers
Labor force participation (%)	63.9	64.1
Weekly work hours for working mothers	63.4	46.7
Hourly wage (yuan) for working mothers	11.9	10.4
Observations	878	819

Source: China's National Dynamic Monitoring Survey of Floating Populations in 2010

Childcare cost elasticities and childcare subsidy simulations for migrant and local mothers

	Migrant mothers		Local mothers	
	LFP	Childcare utilization	LFP	Childcare utilization
Childcare cost elasticity	-0.414***	-2.011***	-0.235**	-1.427***
Childcare subsidy simulation				
Mean of actual value	0.639	0.392	0.646	0.412
Predicted at mean	0.644	0.401	0.650	0.397
Subsidized by 25%	0.714	0.515	0.692	0.482
Subsidized by 50%	0.799	0.667	0.746	0.601

Source: Song and Dong (2016)

3. Childcare and off-farm employment of adults aged 18 and 45 in rural ethnic minority regions

- Ding, Dong and Maurer-Fazio (2016) examine the role that children and grandparents play in the off-farm work decisions of women and men aged 18-45 for three ethnic groups (majority Han, Muslim minorities, and non-Muslim minorities).
- They find that children generally decrease women’s likelihood to participate in local off farm work or migrate for work, while increasing men’s likelihood to do so.
- The gendered effects of young children on off-farm employment are greater for Muslims than non-Muslims.
- In Muslim households the presence of extra men aged between 15 and 70 reduces the likelihood that women engage in off-farm work. The presence in the household of a woman of grandmotherly age (between 46 and 70) supports Muslim women’s ability to migrate for work.
- For non-Muslim households, grandfathers and grandmothers alike, facilitate the ability of parents (male and female) to migrate for work.

Household Income, Poverty Rates, and Employment Patterns in rural ethnic minority regions, by Gender

	Muslim		Non-Muslim Minority		Han	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Per capita annual household income (yuan)	5,835	5,796	4,688	4,532	7,760	7,731
Poverty rate (%)	19.1	19.3	20.9	21.6	9.2	9.5
Distribution of occupational/employment type (%)						
Farm work	77.6	21.2	59.4	23.1	70.2	28.9
Local off-farm work	14.5	44.2	22.8	46.9	18.6	48.0
Nonlocal off-farm work/migration	7.9	34.6	17.8	30.0	11.2	23.1
Number of observations	897	916	1,798	1,777	1,477	1,514

Source: China Household Ethnicity Survey 2012

Multinomial Logit Estimates of Occupational Choice for Muslim and Non-Muslim Minority Women and Men aged 18-45

	Women			Men		
	Farm Work	Local Off-farm Work	Nonlocal Off-farm Work	Farm Work	Local Off-farm Work	Nonlocal Off-farm Work
Muslim minority						
Girl(s) 0-5	0.116***	-0.047	-0.069***	-0.090***	0.124***	-0.034
Boy(s) 0-5	0.114***	-0.046	-0.068***	-0.087***	0.130***	-0.043
Male 15-24	0.067*	-0.069**	0.002	-0.017	-0.008	0.024
Male 25-45	0.121**	-0.114**	-0.007	-0.056	-0.013	0.069
Female 46-70	-0.059	-0.001	0.060**	0.025	-0.078	0.053
Male 46-70	0.077*	-0.099**	0.021	-0.008	-0.130***	0.138***
Non-Muslim Minority						
Girl(s) 0-5	0.061**	-0.035	-0.027	-0.040	-0.090	0.050*
Boy(s) 0-5	-0.016	0.039	-0.023	-0.083***	0.049*	0.034
Girl(s) 6-14	0.011	0.007	-0.018	-0.070***	0.030	0.040
Boy(s) 6-14	-0.085***	0.043*	0.042**	-0.084***	0.019	0.065***
Female 46-70	-0.069***	0.010*	0.059**	0.009	-0.073**	0.063**
Male 46-70	-0.099***	-0.057**	0.156***	-0.074***	-0.108***	0.182***

Source: Ding, Dong and Maurer-Fazio (2016)

4. Off-farm employment and caregiving of rural women and men aged 45-65

- Connelly, Mao and Chen (2016) find that 45 percent of rural women aged 45-65 and 39 percent of rural men in this age group provide care for grandchildren or elderly parents.
- They find that taking care of grandchildren decreases the off-farm employment rate of rural middle-aged men and women by 15.9 and 16.8 percent, respectively. Conditional on being employed off-farm, it also reduces the hours of off-farm work for men, by 18 hours per week.
- Moreover, caring for grandchildren reduces rural middle-aged women's and men's annual earning by 4,800 yuan.
- However, caregiving for parents does not have the same negative effects on off-farm employment, hours worked and earnings.

Time allocation of women and men aged 45-65 in rural China

	Women	Men
Work offer farm	0.10	0.24
Work on farm	0.73	0.68
Weekly hours of off-farm work	46.8	42.8
Care for grandchildren/parents	0.45	0.39
Care for grandchildren and parents	0.05	0.04
Care for parents	0.07	0.08
Care for grandchildren	0.33	0.26
Weekly caring time (hours)		
Care for grandchildren/parents	43.6	38.6
Care for grandchildren and parents	56.0	56.4
Care for parents	15.8	13.9
Care for grandchildren	47.8	42.9
Observations	3,348	2,929

Source: China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) in 2011-2012

5. Gender pension gap and women's economic vulnerability at old age

- China's pension programs do not recognize the contribution of unpaid care work. Unpaid care responsibilities cut short the length of women's employment, making them economically vulnerable at old age.
- Zhao and Zhao (2016) show that Chinese women aged 60 and older have a higher poverty rate than their male counterparts (16.6% versus 13.1%).
- They find there is a large gender pension gap in China, with women receiving less than half of men's pension payments (411 yuan versus 833 yuan per month).
- Their analysis attributes three quarters of the gender pension gap to the fact that women are much less likely than men to participate in the most-generous occupational pension programs.
- The gender differences in obtaining pension-eligible years of formal-sector employment and in number of years of formal-sector employment are the main drivers of gender disparities in access to occupational pension programs and in pension benefit entitlements. These differences explain 47.3% of the overall gender pension gap.

6. Work-family conflict, time poverty and mental health of employed women and men in the urban sector

- Bearing the double burden paid and unpaid care work, women tend to have less time for rest and leisure than men in most countries.
- Qi and Dong (2016) find that time poverty is widespread among urban Chinese workers and time poverty has strong gender and income dimensions.
- Other things being equal, time poverty is more prevalent among female and low-paid workers, especially those who are married and living with young children or the elderly and in the counties with higher overtime-work rates and lower minimum wage standards.
- Liu, MacPhail and Dong (2016) find that total working time, time poverty, and paid and unpaid working time are each negatively related to mental health status of both men and women.
- The gender gap in work burden contributes to the gender inequality in mental health.
- Unpaid care work is associated with greater mental distress than paid work, particularly for men.

Time Poverty Rates of Male and Female Workers in Urban China

	All	Male	Female	Gender gap
Time poverty	27.4	18.9	37.6	18.7
Income and time poverty	20.6	15.7	26.6	10.7
Income-constrained time poverty	10.3	6.1	15.3	9.2
Observations	5,243	2,851	2,392	

Notes: The time poverty threshold is 68.4 hours per week and the income poverty threshold is 60% of the medium income.

Source: The 2008 China Time Use Survey from Qi and Dong (2016)

Gender mental health score and total work hour gaps, by social status and by quantile

	MHS_women	MHS_men	MHS gap	Total work hours_women	Total work hours_men	Total work hours gap	TWHG x β_1	TWHG x β_1 /MHS gap
All workers								
Mean	3.01	2.45	0.56	65.6	60.7	4.9	0.044	0.079
By social status								
Men with high school* versus women with middle school -								
	3.12	2.49	0.63	67.6	56.7	10.9	0.098	0.156
White collar men versus blue collar women								
	3.23	2.34	0.89	67.1	57.9	9.2	0.083	0.093
Urban men versus rural women								
	3.33	2.31	1.02	66.6	59.0	7.6	0.068	0.067
By quantile								
$\tau = 0.5$	1.90	1.44	0.46	64.8	60.2	4.6	0.032	0.070
$\tau = 0.75$	4.22	3.79	0.43	65.8	61.0	4.8	0.058	0.135

Source: Liu, MacPhail and Dong (2016)

Conclusions

- China's existing gendered, household-based care provision arrangements are not compatible with inclusive and sustainable development.
- The recent policy initiatives in response to population aging – replacing the one-child policy by the universal two-child policy and raising retirement age – will further strain the care economy and intensify work-family conflicts.
- Hence, it is essential for unpaid care work to be recognized in mainstream economic and social policies.
- The state and employers should play a greater role in support of care provision.
- A policy priority is to address the care needs of families with low socioeconomic status and the work-family conflict they confront.

Policy recommendations

- Expend coverage of paid maternity leave in the private sector;
- Improve the accessibility and affordability of childcare programs for migrant and other low-income families in the cities and rural families in low-income, remote villages;
- Develop affordable social institutions for eldercare and address the care needs of the rural elderly;
- Accelerate *hukou* reforms and encourage family migration;
- Improve the design of social security programs to recognize caregiving contribution and reduce the “caregiving penalty”;
- Improve the compliance of protective labor market regulations in private sectors and create a family-friendly work environment;
- Encourage men to take on more unpaid care work at home.