

Women provided extra 173 hours of unpaid childcare during pandemic ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Women across the globe provided as much as an additional 173 hours of childcare during the coronavirus pandemic and did not earn anything for it, new research has shown

According to new analysis from the Centre for Global Development, this was about three times more than men, who clocked up just 59 extra unpaid hours as schools shut their doors to stop the spread of the virus.

Researchers estimated that school and preschool closures globally created the need for 672 billion hours of additional unpaid childcare from January to October 2020 – the equivalent of about a million lifetimes.

Using pre-COVID care distributions to conduct the calculations, the study estimated that women (aged 15-64) each provided on average an additional 173 hours of childcare in 2020, which was a total of 501 billion hours.

The findings highlight that policymakers in all countries need to prioritise tackling the issue of unpaid care burdens in order to improve women's economic standing globally, as the burden disproportionately falls on mothers.

"We knew there was a gap, but the immense inequality on who is providing unpaid care is staggering," said Charles Kenny, a senior fellow at the Centre for Global Development.

"Unpaid care burdens continue to pile up for women, and every hour women provide childcare for free is an hour that they can't build their own businesses, work in formal jobs, and secure their economic futures."

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the total unpaid child care burden by more than 12%. In low- and middle-income countries about three quarters of the care workload traditionally falls on women, compared with about two-thirds in high income countries.

"Governments globally, as well as donor institutions like the World Bank who provide support to low- and middle-income countries, should invest in affordable, accessible, and quality childcare solutions at a similar level to investments in other essential infrastructure that enables job creation and economic development," said Megan O'Donnell, who leads the Centre for Global Development's COVID-19 Gender and Development Initiative.

The research hub aims to promote gender equality and long-term prosperity in low- and middle-income countries by informing global and national decision makers' policy responses to the current pandemic and future crises.

She added: "Otherwise, we are limiting the potential and opportunities of caregivers worldwide, who are disproportionately women and girls. This is a big problem, but there are solutions."

Last month, Felicia Willow, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, said: "When it comes to childcare, parents in the UK pay more than parents in every other country bar New Zealand.

"The result is that for too many families it makes more financial sense for one parent to give up work, as they simply do not earn enough to cover childcare costs.

"And as mothers are often the lower earner in the couple – and because of lasting gender norms about who is responsible for childcare – it is more often than not mothers who drop out of the workforce."

Related link: The global childcare workload from school and preschool closures during the COVID-19 pandemic ^[3]

Region: International ^[4]

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