

## Policy Brief: Gender Transformative Policy in the areas of labor, care, and social protection



Figure: FGD with Not Employed (NE) Women (Kalhandi, Odisha)

### About the Study

The study on **Women's Participation in Paid Work and Childcare Arrangements in India** examines the inter-linkages between availability of childcare, the well-being of a child and the ability of mothers with young children, particularly from low income and marginalized communities to engage in paid employment. The study adopts gendered lens examining the factors influencing women's accessibility to childcare and subsequently to join paid.

This research was undertaken in four Indian States viz Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha, and Jharkhand with 1128 participants<sup>1</sup>. Primary data was collected through mixed method approach.

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<sup>1</sup> A total of 1128 women with children under six years of age were interviewed. They belonged to three categories. The numbers and categories are as follows:

- 225 employed women with access to crèches (EAC-20%)
- 340 employed women with no access to crèches (ENAC-30%)
- 563 women not in employment (NE-50%)

**This policy brief argues that gendered notion of a woman's role as a primary caregiver has been internalized by the women as much as by the men through socialization process. This impacts women and child well-being. The first section provides an overview of the contributing factors that influence women's accessibility to childcare provision and their decision to join paid work. The second section highlights the voices of men who are valuing benefits of women's working and children attending creches. The last section proposes policy recommendations to ease the constraints on women by reducing and redistributing the burden of unpaid care work within the family and the state.**

## Evidence

### I. Gender based division of work: A constraint for women

97% women expressed their willingness to send their children to the creches. A significant question before us-why women (ENAC & NE) despite their willingness are not sending their children to creches, even when the creches are available to them? We attempted to examine the various factors which has influence women's accessibility to childcare provision and therefore her decision to join paid work. Based on the study findings, following are the reasons that restrict women to send their children to creches and prevent them joining paid work:

- 1. Women lack agency to decide on availing crèche facilities:** Family members refuse to send children to creches is one of the main reasons for not availing crèches despite its availability. About 20% women responded that elder members in the family are against outside childcare provision. *"I am ready to send my child to a childcare facility, will you convince my husband?"* Statement like this shows that women, despite their willingness had to seek husband or elder approval for outside care arrangements.
- 2. Internalized gendered nature of work:** Amongst women who are currently working but not availing crèche, 23% believed that childcare is solely their responsibility. In addition, men whose children are going to creches and women who are not working were also of the opinion that *'mothers are best in taking care of the child as they believe it is their responsibility'*. On further questioning, the notion of women as *'best caregiver'*, a woman rationalized *"Male members in the family are engaged in full time work. So, they are asking women to do part time work as well as to take care of child."* Majority of the participants believed that *"home is the best place for the child, and no one can take care of the child like family does."* The gender norms governing what constitutes "women's primary work", internalized by both men and women, and the unfavorable gender attitudes of "not allowing women to go out to work" are significant barriers to women engaging in paid work. This gendered division of social roles and responsibilities tends to distort and limit the potential of both men and women<sup>2</sup>. The study highlighted that 89% women who are unemployed are not able to join paid work due to childcare responsibility. Amongst this, 39 % reported that they were working earlier but left their jobs due to childcare responsibility. **The care work burden placed on women in general, and more specifically the responsibility of care of young children, acts as a significant barrier to women**

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<sup>2</sup> Jütting, J., C. Morrison, J. Dayton-Johnson, and D. Drechsler (2008), "Measuring Gender (In)Equality: The OECD gender, institutions and development data base", *Journal of Human Development* 9(1), pp. 65–86.

**engaging in paid work.** This is further echoed by Kabeer (2012)<sup>3</sup> who argues that domestic chores (including care work) restrict women's entry in the labor market and consequently hinders women's income and their earning potential.

## II. **Men valuing benefits of women's working and children attending creches**

Men whose children are attending creches shared that creche provision is associated with increased family income as women have taken up paid work. Many of them agreed that crèche facilities have added to the well-being of women. With creche facility, women's stress has reduced, and they do better both mentally and physically. This improved their mobility as well. They are now able to go to market, bank and able to attend Self-Help Group meetings.

It is evident that the gender norms and cultural practices are the main reasons for women not accessing creche rather than women not seeing the value of crèche facilities. Availability of childcare facilities is not enough. The fact is that women lack agency to decide what is good for them and their children and therefore, they are not in a position to access the facilities. Therefore, despite seeing the value in leaving the child at a crèche and fulfilling their desire to join paid work, many women are unable to do so and are waiting for approval from either husbands or elders in the family. Women are unable to imagine men in caregiving roles. There is lack of local role models for them to emulate. Similarly, though men perceive the benefits associated with women joining paid work, yet they are not ready to share the childcare responsibilities. In a nutshell, patriarchal norms continue to place a disproportionate burden of care on women, adversely affecting their access to paid work.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **1. Making unpaid care work visible and valuable through developing National Care System:**

Since several decades, government and civil society are actively trying to address the widespread gender inequality in the society. Undoubtedly, a progress has been achieved but gaps remain. Still, women are overrepresented in unpaid care work. To address this, there is a need to make the unpaid care work done by women more visible and break the notion of women as 'natural' unpaid care worker. There is a need to re-conceptualize care as collective notion and to build national care system that can provide required care to young child, elderly, or person with disabilities. In this context, the 4R framework proposed by ILO to promote more decent work for caregivers can be referred. The elements of 4R framework are

- A. Recognize: To recognize the unpaid care work performed by women/ girls as a work with value. Visualizing care work as an investment is the first and significant step.
- B. Reduce: To reduce the number of hours women/girls spent in daily care work by developing care-supporting infrastructure and time-saving devices.
- C. Redistribute: To redistribute the unpaid care work from female to male members within the family and then shift this responsibility to state and private players.
- D. Represent: To incorporate the voices of caregivers in developing and designing policies, services and systems that affect their lives.

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<sup>3</sup>Kabeer N (2012) Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labor markets and enterprise development. *Int Dev Res Cent* 44(10):1–70.

**2. Gender responsive and gender transformative policies in the areas of care, labor and social protection:** Gender responsive and transformative institutional policies related to care, labor and social protection will have a strong effect on women's work participation. These include innovative and transformative practices to recognize and support the rights of women informal workers; addressing gender stereotypes and cultural barriers through increased investments and incentives for programs promoting father's engagement in caregiving; programs to develop responsive caregiving capacities of parents (Based on UNICEF's Family-Friendly Policies); targeted policy initiatives for gender responsive recovery from COVID-19 impacts and economic fallout; large scale public opinion building for shifting women's social narratives to value women's unpaid care work and economic rights and redistribute the care burden; etc.