

CARE WORK AND THE ECONOMY

Advancing policy solutions with gender-aware macroeconomic models

Care Work and the Economy (CWE-GAM) & Levy Institute Intensive Course

Session Brief: Day 3, Africa/Europe Time-zone

Facilitator: Nancy Folbre, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Session 1 - The Meaning of Care and the Nature of Care Work

The focus of the session was the relationship between paid and unpaid care work. Professor Folbre talked about the non-valuation of unpaid work and the invisibility of paid care work and the weak bargaining position of those who engage in such occupations.

Discussion

Lorena Valle Cuellar: Post Kaleckian macroeconomic models treated the gender wage gap as exogenous, but I see the wage gap as a symptom of more structural inequalities that have to do with the gender division of labor. Not thinking about the wage gap as a given will enrich macroeconomic analysis as a whole.

Nancy Folbre: I agree, I don't like post Keynesian models because they focus on labor and capital and it's difficult to squeeze in unpaid labor. I'm a fan of overlapping generations models because it allows for an endogenous reproductive sector and transfers in the reproductive sector.

Izaskun Zuazu: The differentiation between the social norms that govern people that work in financial services versus those that govern people working in care work. For example, what is the punishment when your work leads to a global economic crisis and what it might be if the care receiver is not happy.

Nancy Folbre: This is a case where ethnographic research on work culture would lead to important insights about the outcomes.

Deepta Chopra: One of the care penalties is the informalization of work i.e., women being pushed into low and informal sectors of the economy. Is there an inverse relationship between the two? where women working in the informal sector affects care work.

Nancy Folbre: I think it's a very under explored area and a very rich area for survey research. Such research might require different survey instruments than the ones we are currently relying on.

Zenzi Pahla: Part of the reason why care work is being resistant to change is because people who design technology don't design them with a care perspective. The second thing I want to mention is regarding social climate. There is a gross lack of trust in governments. And the care sector which is the intrinsic fabric of society, and it is built on trust and cooperation. This lack of trust in the government is why people are unwilling to invest in care and social services.

Nancy Folbre: We really need ways to understand the elasticity of substitution between paid and unpaid work because clearly they are substitutable to some extent. But this substitutability is very limited and highly dependent on the level of income.

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Melissa Langworthy: When thinking about the cultural meaning of work, I'd like to point out that it's temporal. For example, my responsibilities and expectations towards my child are not the same as my mothers. They evolve, just as technology is substituting for paid labor, the social mores are changing as well. Therefore, this may also not be a question of substitutes for care, but also the quality of substitutes. In my mind, technology is not just a replacement in the labor market for care, but it is also establishing frameworks of capabilities.

Nancy Folbre: This really points to the tradeoff between quality and quantity, and the time that you devote to it.

Mariem Liouaeddine: The type of the sector, public versus private. I think that even if there is a situation of wage equality, there could still be inequality in promotion.

Nancy Folbre: There is a lot of evidence in both the public and private sectors of a glass ceiling for women. It is related to traditional norms, outright discrimination, and it is partly related to the kind of perception of care responsibilities and to the organization of paid work, that makes it very difficult.

Samb Mbathio: In some countries women and men receive different salaries, because family members allowances are included in men salaries and not in woman salaries and I think this relates to cultural inheritance, where the men support care expenses and not the woman.

Nancy Folbre: This was true in the early part of the 20th century for the US and Great Britain. It took a long time for that to change, and that concept of a male family wage is still very powerful in many parts of the world and it's really something we need to challenge.

Gerelmaa Bayarmagnai: Since caregivers usually earn lower than their partners, they will increase their time in care work, it is like a cycle. Also, there is discrimination of women not only by men but also by women and female caregivers. My question is there any research that looks at relative time spent by men and women in caregiving?

Nancy Folbre: Yes, there is such research, and we will get into that when we talk about time use surveys. What you were saying earlier is a good example of what I'm getting at, gender inequality is not just the result of discrimination or men trying to exploit women. There are fundamental economic reasons why a gender division of labor has emerged and why specialization and care work limits the bargaining power, potential earnings and potential political voice of women. This implies that to move towards gender equality we need to reorganize work to minimize the conflicts between commitments to other people and economic productivity.

Session 2 - Accounting for Unpaid Work and Time Use

The second session focused on how to use time in survey data to think about the care economy and how to improve existing surveys. Professor Folbre contrasted the two types of time use surveys by administering first a diary-based time survey and then an activity list-based time survey in class. The diary-based method is more precise since it just requires the respondent to report what they did the previous day, but the activity-list method requires the respondent to make some calculations and actively estimate time spent in different activities. The diary method reduces the social desirability bias because the questions are more neutral. Yet, both methods have their shortcomings, such as not capturing supervisory care, and surveyors need to be cognizant of them.

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Discussion

Melissa Langworthy: I've been thinking about emotional support, it might not be classified as directly supervisory.

Lorena Valle Cuellar: I think it's really interesting how women rearrange care when they migrate. Even if they are not physically present they are still providing care to their children and technology plays an important role here. For example, women engage in supervisory care through video calls and chatting with their kids even while engaging in paid work. And time-use surveys might not capture all of this work and activities.

Nancy Folbre: This is an example where technological change is actually lowering the cost of care.

Zenzi Pahl: In terms of the supervisory care issue there are many activities that do not get recorded, for example, teaching a child to walk or talk which are fundamental to a child's development. Additionally, there are crossovers of care, such as when a child or an elder is also disabled. Another example is when you're just talking to an elder (keeping them company), you might not think of it as a burden, but you don't also consider it as social time.

Deepta Chopra: How does one get around the problem of convincing policy makers at the national level to invest in time use surveys when they are so expensive?

Nancy Folbre: I think we really need to move towards the kind of light diary format, and I see light diaries is kind of a hybrid between an activity list approach and a time diary approach. If you look at the existing time use survey literature there's just a lot of detailed information that no one is using, and so we need to simplify these surveys. Jonathan Gershuny and Oriel Sullivan of the UK have been developing a click and drag survey to be administered digitally and I think that some of the results they reported are really interesting. It's not immediately adaptable to developing countries but technology is becoming more feasible in these countries. I think if we were willing to spend less money on hiring people to give surveys and more money on the respondents themselves, we could get better results.

Martina Querejeta: I have a question about how we can take advantage of technology to make time use surveys easier and cheaper to administer. My other question is about how to measure the value added to the current economy from unpaid services. I really think it's important for national accounts to consider time as an input in household consumption.

Nancy Folbre: I think a real, serious problem with time use surveys, is that they don't collect data on expenditures and a big problem with expenditure surveys is they don't collect data on time, and so we really can't assess the substitutability between unpaid and paid work, and income from paid work and the good news is, I think that that's about to change that the at least here in the US.

Anne Loescner: Feminist economists places an emphasis on the wage gap, but what I think is missing is the role of social provisioning. Maybe we need to get back to a situation where people were less dependent in wage rates and labor.

Nancy Folbre: What I like about the care framework is exactly what you're emphasizing. It moves us away from thinking about just about discrimination and wage gaps to the larger process of provisioning that you know and that's a really good thing.