

Violence Against Women: The Cyclical Connection with Unpaid Labor

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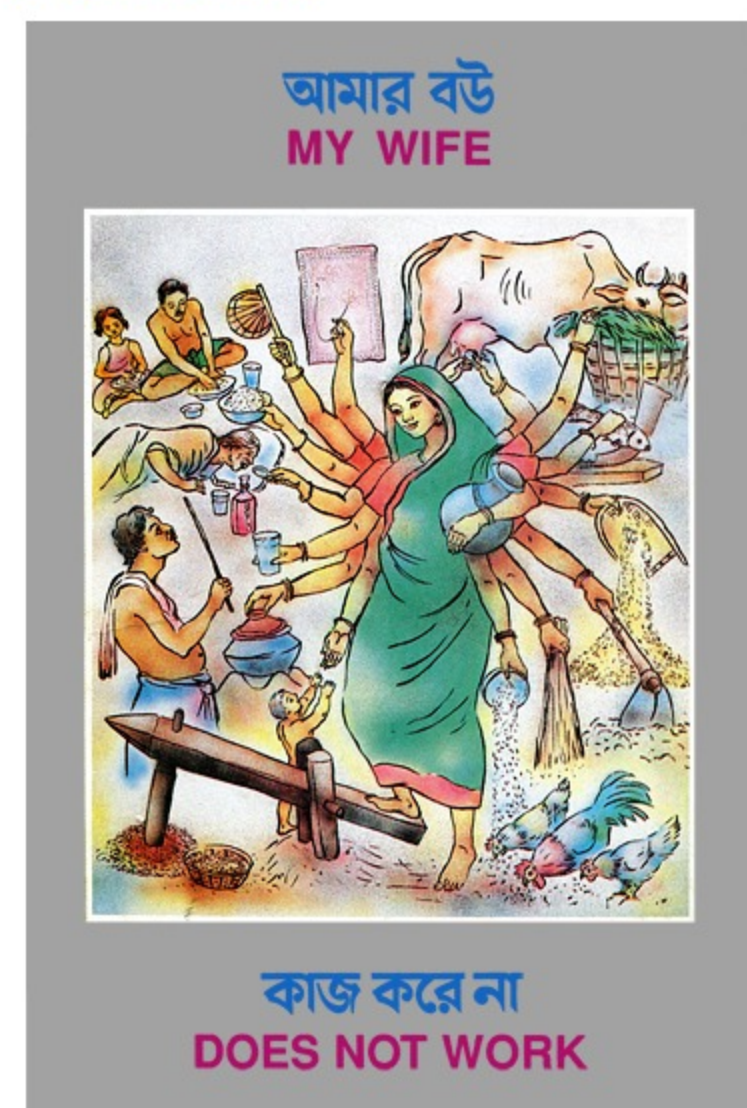
Posted by Maria Jose in [Public Policy Advisory](#)

Violence against women is a symptom of a much larger problem. A symptom produced by a whirlpool of competing issues that revolve around the status and dignity of women. A primary factor behind women's lower status is the belief that their contribution is less than a man's. Many women have come to believe that their unpaid domestic work is not worth considering in this equation.

The Connection between Unpaid Work and Violence Against Women

Women's unpaid work, though essential for households and economies to function, is valued less than paid work. A full day's work of cooking, cleaning, caring and a whole host of other household tasks often go unacknowledged. The non-recognition of a woman's contribution therefore leads to their devaluation and disrespect, manifesting itself in discrimination and violence¹.

Banchte Shekha, an NGO in Bangladesh, produced a poster now famous for morbidly capturing the disproportionate workload on women. It shows a woman with 12 hands working to feed her family, care for sick parents and other domestic duties. The caption below reads 'My Wife Does Not Work', demonstrating the lack of recognition of her work.



'My Wife Does Not Work' – A poster by NGO Banchte Shekha in Bangladesh

Critics of the national income accounting system argue a country's GDP would sky-rocket if it attached monetary value to women's unpaid work. According to the United Nations, women's unpaid work globally is approximately worth \$11 trillion USD a year². This is a startling figure which rarely leads to a discussion about what stems from this lack of recognition.

Costs Associated with Violence Against Women

Violence against women costs the economy, impacting healthcare systems, legal and justice systems, human and economic development. For instance, McKinsey's calculations show violence against women costs about \$4.9 billion to the United States economy annually. This translates to 70% from direct medical costs, 15% from lost productivity, and 15% from lifetime lost earnings³.

In India, studies indicate that women can lose an average of at least five paid work days for each incident of intimate partner violence⁴. This equates to these woman getting 25% less of her salary per violent incident. The following statistic demonstrates this impact more acutely: the costs of delivering a minimum package of essential services for women and girls who experienced violence accounts for .25% of Lao PDR's GDP and .29% of Timor Leste's GDP.

Steps that India has Taken

After the Delhi gang rape in 2012, the Ministry of Women and Child Development set aside funds to provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to victims. Though a laudatory step, India's approach remains reactive rather than proactive. These One Stop Crisis Centers provide shelter, police assistance, legal, medical and counselling services. The government also allotted financial assistance to each center worth Rs 1 lakh (\$1500USD) for per unit in tandem with a hospital. It also provided Rs 46 lakh (\$69,000USD) for a small permanent counselling structure.

By August 2017, the Government of India set up a total of 151 One Stop Centers under the Nirbhaya fund. According to a recent Human Rights Watch report, these centers were set up hastily without coordination between the concerned stakeholders. As a result, victims of violence still shuttle between the police station to file a preliminary report and the related public hospital for a medical exam.

Do we have a Solution?

Legislation can help improve functionality of crisis centers, along with making punishments harsher. However legislation alone is insufficient, since violence against women is complex. Researching the connection between violence against women and how women's unpaid work is devalued may also help. Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked: "Legislation cannot by itself normally solve deep rooted social problems. One has to approach them in other ways too, but legislation is necessary and essential so that it may give that push and have that educative factor as well as the legal sanctions behind it, which help public opinion to be given a certain shape."

Most current interventions to reduce violence against women are those that target women's empowerment or a bystander intervention involving boys and men. The former seeks to reduce social and economic dependency on men. The latter engages males to change their attitude and behavior in responding to violence. However, it would be worthwhile to additionally explore interventions that work with both men and women since emerging studies have shown they are more effective than these single-sex interventions – this requires a detailed analysis of the cycle between women's unpaid labor and its value, her worth, and resulting violence.

References:

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3. Violence Against Women Could Cost the U.S. \$500 Billion Annually, <http://fortune.com/2016/04/07/violence-against-women-cost/>
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About Maria Jose

Maria is interested in Private Sector Development and Women's Empowerment. She previously worked at the World Resources Institute and Citigroup.

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