

Work-Family Conflicts Confronting Women in China: Evidence from the 2008 Time-Use Survey

Xiao-Yuan Dong
University of Winnipeg

Xinli An
National Bureau of Statistics of China

As women in many parts of the world, Chinese women bear a majority responsibility for the care and development of people including children, the elderly, the sick, and able-bodied adults at home, while holding half of the sky in the work place. China's on-going economic transformations heightened the strain on the dual demands of work and family responsibilities for women, with negative consequences to the well-being of women and their families. However, the work-family conflicts Chinese women confront have not received much attention from researchers and policy makers, partly because care work performed by women at home are unpaid and not counted by conventional surveys of economic activity. In 2008, the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS) launched the country's first large-scale, comprehensive time-use survey (TUS). Using time diary methods, the survey collects data on the daily activities of 37,142 individuals between the ages of 25 and 74 from 16,661 households in ten provinces on a week day and a weekend day. The rich information of this survey provides a good basis for estimating and valuing unpaid care work and its contribution to the national well-being. This paper uses data from China's first TUS to analyze some aspects of unpaid care work that are "invisible" in conventional labour force and household survey data. We first describe the patterns of time use from a comparative perspective. We find that compared to men and women in the U.S., Japan and India, the total hours of paid and unpaid work combined are the lowest for urban Chinese men but the highest for rural Chinese women. We next apply a seemingly unrelated regression technique to estimate how unpaid work is interacted with other activities – paid work, personal care, and leisure. The estimates show that other things being equal, Chinese women in the rural and the urban sectors spent 17 and 12 more hours per week on unpaid housework and care than men, respectively. Unpaid work limited Chinese women's capabilities for income earnings, relaxation and personal care. Finally, we estimate the monetary value of unpaid work and compare the results with a range of macroeconomic indicators. The estimates indicate that unpaid work in China accounted for about a quarter of GDP and 60 percent of the value of tertiary industry. The findings call for policy measures that recognize the contribution of unpaid work, reduce the care burdens imposed on women, and redistribute care responsibilities between the state, markets and families, and within the family, between women and men.