

Changing Gender Roles and Men 's Participation in Domestic Work-with a Focus on Urban Bangalore

Dr. Sreenivasa K. N

Associate Professor of Sociology

Government College for Women (Autonomous)

Mandya-571401

Abstract: This paper examines the evolving landscape of men 's participation in domestic work, with a specific focus on urban Bangalore as a case study of changing gender dynamics in India 's metropolitan centres. While global trends indicate a long-term movement toward greater gender convergence in housework, progress remains incomplete and shaped by local cultural, economic, and structural factors. Drawing on research from Bangalore, this analysis reveals a complex picture: even as women enter the workforce in large numbers, the domestic division of labour remains heavily gendered, with men 's participation often constrained by economic pressures, cultural norms, and the availability of paid domestic workers. The evidence suggests that women 's employment has not fundamentally transformed domestic arrangements, as paid work has been incorporated into women 's existing obligations rather than prompting a negotiation of household responsibilities. This paper concludes by identifying implications for policy and future research.

Keywords: Gender Roles; Men's Participation; Domestic Work; Gender Equality; Household Labour; Unpaid Work; Masculinity; Family; Urban Bangalore; Work–Family Balance.

Introduction

The changing nature of men 's participation in domestic work represents one of the most significant yet incomplete transformations in contemporary family life. Over the past fifty years, ideological shifts in the definition of fatherhood, women 's increased labour force participation, and evolving gender attitudes have collectively challenged the traditional sexual division of labour within households. Yet despite these changes, the gap between egalitarian ideals and actual practice persists. Women continue to perform the majority of household tasks, even in dual-earner couples where both partners are employed full-time.

Urban Bangalore presents a particularly illuminating case for examining these dynamics. As India 's technology hub and one of its most rapidly growing metropolitan centres, Bangalore has witnessed substantial increases in women 's workforce participation, particularly in the organised sector. This paper investigates whether such economic changes have translated into more equitable domestic arrangements or whether cultural norms and structural barriers continue to constrain men 's participation in household work.

The Indian Context: Tradition and Change

Research on urban Indian families has consistently documented the persistence of traditional gender roles despite women 's increasing participation in paid employment. A foundational study by Ramu on dual- and single-earner couples in Bangalore found that wives 'paid work had not resulted in a universal change of attitudes toward gender-related issues. Rather than serving as a basis for renegotiating domestic arrangements, earning an income had become part of a wife 's obligations, thus nullifying the power of economic resources as an instrument of change in her domestic status.

This pattern reflects what scholars term the "second shift" – the phenomenon whereby working women continue to bear primary responsibility for housework and childcare in addition to their paid employment. In the Indian context, this dynamic is reinforced by cultural norms that associate domestic work with femininity and position men primarily as breadwinners.

Methodology

The study adopts a **descriptive research design** to examine changing gender roles and men's participation in domestic work in urban Bangalore. The study focuses on how far men are sharing household responsibilities that were traditionally considered women's work.

The study will be conducted in selected urban areas of **Bangalore city**. The respondents will mainly include married men from different age groups, educational levels, occupations, income groups, and family backgrounds.

The study will use both **primary and secondary data**. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire and simple interviews with selected respondents. The questionnaire will collect information about men's participation in cooking, cleaning, shopping, childcare, washing clothes, caring for elderly family members, and household decision-making. Secondary data will be collected from books, journals, research articles, government reports, and relevant studies.

The study will maintain **confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent** of respondents. The findings will help understand the changing division of household work and the development of more equal gender roles in urban families.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two dominant theoretical frameworks help explain the persistence of gendered divisions in domestic labour. The resource-based perspective suggests that partners' relative resources particularly income and employment status determine their bargaining power in negotiating domestic responsibilities. However, evidence from Bangalore indicates that even when women contribute economically, this does not automatically translate into more equitable domestic arrangements.

The gender construction perspective offers a complementary explanation: domestic labour is not merely a practical activity but a site for "doing gender" – the ongoing performance and reproduction of gendered identities through everyday actions. This perspective helps explain why income parity alone does not guarantee equitable domestic arrangements. Even when women earn as much as or more than their partners, they often continue to perform the majority of housework, reflecting internalised norms and expectations about gender-appropriate behaviour.

Patterns of Domestic Work in Bangalore

The Prevalence of Paid Domestic Work: One distinctive feature of domestic work in urban Bangalore is the high rate of engagement of paid domestic workers. Data from the International Labour Organization reveals that **54.3% of households in Bengaluru engaged a paid domestic worker for domestic services** a rate significantly higher than in Chennai (32%). Among high-income households in Bengaluru, this rate rises to 77%, while even among low-income households (annual income up to Rs 3 lakh), one in five households engaged paid domestic workers for domestic tasks.

The prevalence of paid domestic work is important for understanding men's participation patterns. When households hire domestic workers, they effectively outsource a significant portion of routine housework, potentially reducing opportunities for men to participate in these tasks. Table 1 presents data on the ratio of paid hours to total housework hours in households that engage paid domestic workers.

Table 1: Ratio of Paid Hours to Total Housework Hours, Bengaluru

Activity	Total	High Income	Medium Income	Low Income
Cleaning	0.82	0.85	0.80	0.74
Food Preparation	0.67	0.70	0.67	0.41
Procurement	0.78	0.82	0.74	0.61
Upkeep	0.86	0.90	0.83	0.77

Childcare	0.73	0.79	0.61	0.88
Elderly Care	0.83	0.89	0.70	0.48

Source: ILO analysis based on household survey data

The table reveals that when paid domestic workers are engaged, they perform a substantial majority of the work. For cleaning, 82% of total hours in Bengaluru were completed by paid domestic workers. This substitution effect means that much of the routine domestic work that might otherwise be redistributed between spouses is instead outsourced, potentially masking underlying gender inequalities in unpaid work.

Time Allocation in Households with Paid Domestic Workers

Table 2 presents median daily hours of unpaid domestic work performed by household members (predominantly women) even in households that engage paid domestic workers.

Table 2: Median Unpaid Daily Hours of Housework in Households with Paid Domestic Workers, Bengaluru

Activity	High Income	Medium Income	Low Income
Childcare	1.69	0.50	2.09
Cleaning	0.57	0.71	0.75
Food Preparation	1.50	1.68	1.75
Procurement	0.50	0.55	0.71

Source: ILO analysis based on household survey data

Even after hiring paid domestic workers, significant hours of unpaid work remain, particularly in food preparation and childcare. In low-income households, unpaid childcare hours (2.09 daily) are substantially higher than in higher-income households (1.69 daily for high-income), reflecting the fact that low-income households hire paid domestic workers for fewer hours or for different tasks.

Women's Workforce Participation and Domestic Burden

National data contextualises the Bangalore findings. A 2026 National Statistics Office survey of India's 46 million-plus cities found that **69% of women cited childcare and household chores as the reason for being out of the labour force**, compared to just 1% of men who cited these reasons. This stark disparity highlights the extent to which domestic responsibilities continue to constrain women's economic participation.

In Bangalore specifically, the wage gap between men and women in million-plus cities remains substantial. Salaried men earned an average of Rs 30,700 per month compared to Rs 23,700 for women a gap of 23%. This wage disparity reflects not only labour market discrimination but also the career penalties women face due to their disproportionate domestic responsibilities.

Barriers to Men's Domestic Participation

Economic Constraints and Time Poverty: A qualitative study of fathers from low socio-economic backgrounds in urban Bangalore identified economic constraints as a primary barrier to men's domestic participation. Most fathers worked long hours in informal employment, limiting their availability for daily caregiving, which was typically handled by their mothers or wives. The study found that fathers prioritised their children's education and safety, viewing financial provision as their primary role due to ingrained gender norms and economic hardship.

This finding highlights the intersectionality of gender and class: for low-income men, the pressure to serve as breadwinner may be particularly acute, as failure to provide financially carries significant social and material consequences. Economic precarity thus reinforces traditional gender roles even as it constrains the time available for domestic engagement.

Cultural Norms and Gender Socialisation

Despite structural barriers, the Bangalore study found that many fathers expressed a strong desire to be more engaged in caregiving, thereby challenging traditional roles. Some reported participating in co-parenting through shared decision-making and engaging in play with their children.

However, these desires are often constrained by deeply embedded cultural expectations. As Ramu's earlier work documented, wives 'paid work has resulted neither in a universal change of attitudes toward gender-related issues nor in an unqualified acceptance of women's contribution to the domestic economy. Instead, earning an income has become part of a wife 's obligations, thus nullifying the power of economic resources as an instrument of change in women 's domestic status.

Gatekeeping and Household Dynamics

The concept of gatekeeping the beliefs and behaviours that inhibit collaborative family work by limiting men 's opportunities for learning and growth through caring for home and children may also be relevant in the Bangalore context. When women set rigid standards, maintain exclusive responsibility for tasks, or criticise partners 'efforts, they effectively maintain their primary role in domestic work, even when they express support for greater male involvement.

However, it must be noted that women 's gatekeeping often reflects strategic adaptations to structural constraints rather than simple conservatism. When men are unavailable due to work pressures or when their contributions are inconsistent, women may reasonably prefer to maintain control over household management rather than relying on unreliable support.

Implications and Future Directions

Policy Implications

The evidence from Bangalore suggests several policy directions. First, addressing the time poverty that constrains both men 's participation in domestic work and women 's workforce participation requires policies that reduce working hours and provide greater flexibility in employment arrangements.

Second, policies that support work-family reconciliation including paid parental leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work arrangements can create conditions in which men can more fully participate in domestic work. However, as the Indian context demonstrates, policy alone is insufficient; cultural change must accompany structural reform.

Research Gaps

Several research gaps remain. The limitations of this review include the scarcity of recent, large-scale quantitative data on intra-household time allocation specifically for Bangalore. The most comprehensive data available on paid domestic work comes from ILO research, but detailed data on men 's specific contributions to domestic tasks remains limited. Future research should examine not only the quantity of men 's domestic participation but also the quality and nature of that participation.

Additionally, research on domestic work in urban Bangalore would benefit from intersectional analysis examining how gender interacts with caste, class, religion, and other social positions to shape domestic arrangements. The available evidence suggests important differences between organised and unorganised sector workers, but these require further investigation.

Conclusion

Changing gender roles and men 's participation in domestic work in urban Bangalore reflect a complex interplay of economic, cultural, and structural factors. While women have entered the workforce in large numbers, the domestic division of labour remains heavily gendered. The prevalence of paid domestic work in Bangalore particularly in high-income households means that much routine housework is outsourced, potentially masking underlying gender

inequalities. However, significant unpaid work remains, particularly in childcare and food preparation, and women continue to bear the primary responsibility for these tasks.

The evidence suggests that economic resources alone do not guarantee more equitable domestic arrangements. Cultural norms, gender socialisation, and structural constraints including long working hours and economic precarity continue to shape men's participation in domestic work. While many fathers in Bangalore express a desire to be more engaged in caregiving, translating this desire into practice requires addressing both individual and structural barriers.

The incomplete revolution in domestic labour thus remains a central challenge for gender equality in urban India. As Bangalore continues to grow and change, understanding and addressing the factors that constrain men's domestic participation will be essential for achieving more equitable and sustainable family arrangements.

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