DISCUSSION PAPER

Time Spent on Unpaid Domestic and Caregiving Services by Children in India: Insights into gender, age and learning

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Executive Summary

Child labour persists in many regions of the world, with negative impacts on children's health, schooling and overall development. One example of this is unpaid care and domestic work within the family, which, when carried out for many hours, can disrupt children's learning, rest or play. Across the world, girls bear a higher burden of unpaid care and domestic work than boys, and are more vulnerable to being engaged in these activities for long hours. This can hinder school attendance and limit time spent learning, which in turn constrains future job and personal development opportunities.

In the context of India, girls' engagement in unpaid care and domestic work at age 12, for over two hours daily on average, has been identified as the primary contributor to the gender gap in education later in life. Such work is often related to poverty, with poor girls often assisting their mothers, as well as the absence of crèche facilities, implying that many women workers opt to leave their children at home with their siblings.

Drawing on India's Time Use Survey 2019 (TUS 2019), this paper explores the engagement in unpaid domestic and caregiving services among children aged 6–17 years in India, and its association with learning activities. It also examines how these outcomes vary by gender, age and location (rural or urban). While TUS 2019 was not designed with a focus on children, so may not be nationally representative for the age groups considered here, the analysis makes a relevant contribution to the literature on unpaid care and domestic work, given that time use data for children is relatively rarely available. The findings of the paper are especially relevant in the post-pandemic context, where the risk of child labour is higher due to economic losses and prolonged periods of school closure.

Participation and time spent by children on unpaid domestic and caregiving services

- One in five children (20 per cent) participated in unpaid domestic services during the day before the interview, with rates significantly varying by gender (32.9 per cent among girls versus 9.1 per cent among boys), age (36.2 per cent among children aged 15–17 years versus 13.8 per cent among children aged 6–14 years) and location (21.5 per cent in rural areas versus 15.7 per cent in urban areas).
- Only 6.4 per cent of children participated in caregiving services, with similar patterns by gender and location to those described above for domestic services. Age differentials show instead that younger children are more likely to participate in caregiving than older children (6.9 per cent versus 5 per cent, respectively). Adolescents are more likely to be engaged in more complex indirect care work, such as meal preparation and dwelling maintenance, while younger children are 'only' asked to watch the dependants.
- For both domestic and caregiving services, gender differences in participation slightly increase with age. Within both age groups (6–14 years and 15–17 years), participation in domestic services is about four times higher for girls than boys, while participation in caregiving services is 1.3 times higher for girls than boys.

- For both domestic and caregiving services, participation rates are higher in rural than urban areas across all four gender–age groups, though rural–urban differentials in participation are smaller for caregiving services. Participation in domestic services is highest among rural adolescent girls aged 15–17 years (64.4 per cent), while participation in caregiving services is highest among younger rural girls aged 6–14 years (8.2 per cent).
- Girls spend almost 70 per cent more time on domestic services than boys (134 versus 79 minutes per day, respectively). Such gender differentials hold for both younger and older children but are greater in the latter group. As observed for participation, time spent on domestic services is higher for older children and those living in rural areas. However, rural–urban differentials in time spent on domestic services are statistically significant among girls only. Time spent on domestic services is highest for rural adolescent girls aged 15–17 years, who spent an average of 170 minutes per day on this activity.
- On average, children aged 6–17 years spend about 95 minutes per day on caregiving services, with little variation by gender and age group. There are instead significant differences by location, with children in rural areas spending more time on caregiving than those in urban areas (97 versus 85 minutes per day). However, such rural–urban differentials are statistically significant among younger children only. Time spent on caregiving services is highest for rural boys aged 6–14 years, who spent an average of 99.3 minutes per day on this activity.

Participation and time spent by children on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by activity

- Participation in domestic services is significantly higher for girls than boys for all activities, except for pet care, for which there was no statistically significant gender difference in participation. The highest gender differentials in participation are observed for food preparation (almost 20 percentage points) and cleaning and maintaining own dwelling (16 percentage points).
- The participation rate of boys marginally exceeds that of girls in two domestic activities only: shopping for own household members, and travelling, moving, transporting or accompanying goods or persons related to unpaid domestic services for household members, both entailing mobility outside the home.
- In terms of time spent, a similar pattern is observed, with girls spending more time than boys on all activities, except for do-it-yourself decoration, maintenance and repair, and pet care. Gender differentials are especially large for food and meals management and preparation, household management for own final use and care and maintenance of textiles and footwear.
- Time spent by boys significantly exceeds that of girls on only one unpaid domestic service activity: travelling, moving, transporting or accompanying goods or persons.

Participation and time spent on learning activities

- Close to 70 per cent of children are engaged in formal education, with a similar proportion doing homework, being tutored, course review, research and activities related to formal education. While gender differentials are relatively smaller than those observed for participation in domestic services, in most cases they are statistically significant and in favour of boys.
- There is little variation in time spent on the different learning activities by boys and girls. However, gender differences are statistically significant regarding time spent on homework and other activities related to formal education (higher for girls) and time spent on additional study and non-formal education (higher for boys).
- There is a strong negative association between unpaid domestic and caregiving activities and participation in learning, especially among girls and older children. Girls involved in unpaid domestic and caregiving services are about 22 percentage points less likely to participate in learning than those who are not involved, representing a reduction in learning participation of about 24 per cent.
- Participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services is also negatively associated with the time children spend on learning.

Conclusions

Neglecting the burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving services on children can have substantial negative implications, including reduced participation in and time spent on learning as well as difficulties in transitioning to the adult labour market. These challenges are especially relevant for girls due to their higher engagement in domestic and caregiving services.

Several policy actions are needed to reduce the burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving services on India's children, especially girls. Firstly, investment is needed in services that reduce household domestic work burdens in rural areas, including access to water, electrification, roads and infrastructure, and safe public transportation. It is also crucial to expand access to affordable childcare services that can alleviate the burden on children who often care for younger siblings.

Social protection programmes, such as cash transfers, can also reduce the need for children's labour at home by providing financial support to families. The government should also implement programmes that promote gender equality in household responsibilities, encouraging boys to participate equally in domestic tasks. Interventions with parents and caregivers, community leaders and other stakeholders have the potential to change societal attitudes and norms regarding the division of labour within households and emphasize that education is a priority for all children.

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1. Context

Child labour remains a significant global challenge, disrupting children's education and opportunities for growth and development. Many forms of child labour also remain invisible, falling outside the purview of official statistics on child labour. One such form links to unpaid household care work within the family, where children may spend considerable time supporting parents, particularly mothers, with domestic chores. These chores may take up large amounts of time, disrupting schooling, learning and play, yet they often remain outside the purview of official statistics on child labour in many countries.

Girls in many countries bear a significant burden of unpaid care and domestic work, encompassing tasks within their households and communities that are often overlooked in official gross domestic product (GDP) statistics. For instance, globally, girls aged 5–14 years dedicate 550 million hours daily to household chores, exceeding boys their age by 150 million hours.[1] This workload can impede their school participation, limit study time and constrain future job prospects, hindering personal development opportunities.[2] Research by Young Lives India revealed that girls' engagement in unpaid care and domestic work at age 12, for over two hours daily on average, is the primary contributor to the gender gap in education later in life.[3] Another study by UNICEF and the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute found that a significant percentage of girls aged 5–14 years in India were not attending school due to their involvement in such chores.[4] Studies indicate that, in poorer households, girls often assist their mothers with such tasks.[5] For example, in some regions of India, girls care for their siblings while their mothers work, as, in the absence of crèche facilities, women workers opt to leave their children at home with their siblings.[6]

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the gender and age aspects of unpaid domestic and caregiving services among children aged 6–17 years in India, and their association with learning activities. Drawing on India's Time Use Survey 2019 (TUS 2019),[7] the paper contributes to: (i) better understanding of the participation and time spent by girls and boys on unpaid domestic and caregiving services and learning (both within and after school hours – i.e., homework); and (ii) exploration of the heterogeneity by age (children aged 6–14 years and older children or adolescents aged 15–17 years) and location (rural and urban). It is important to note that TUS 2019 was not designed with a focus on children, so it may not be nationally representative for the age groups considered in this paper. Despite this limitation, the analysis presented in the paper makes a unique contribution to the literature on unpaid care and domestic work, given that time use data availability for children is relatively uncommon.

The findings of the paper are especially relevant in the post-pandemic context. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown exacerbated the challenges faced by women and girls in relation to care responsibilities, including, for instance, taking more time to collect water due to restricted access to resources.[8] Further, school closures and parental job losses introduced new challenges for children, particularly girls, who likely faced increased care responsibilities.[9] The economic consequences of COVID-19 also translated to an estimated 47 million women and girls at risk of falling into extreme poverty, potentially exacerbating the burden of unpaid care work.[10]

The paper is structured in the following way. Section 2 presents the main characteristics of the TUS 2019 survey and provides details of the main activities considered in this paper. Section 3 presents findings on participation in and time spent on domestic and caregiving services. Section 4 presents details on the specific activities carried out by children within domestic and caregiving services. Section 5 describes children's engagement in learning activities and its association with unpaid domestic and caregiving services, while section 6 concludes with reflections on policy implications.

2. Data and methods

The paper analyses data from the TUS 2019, the first national time use survey in India. Covering 138,799 households, with 82,897 in rural and 55,902 in urban areas, the survey employed stratified sampling and collected information on time use (time spent on a range of activities during a period of 24 hours starting from 4 a.m. on the day before the date of interview to 4 a.m. on the day of the interview) for individuals aged 6 years and above. Hence, in the analysis sample weights are applied.

Utilizing the International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics (ICATUS) 2016, the TUS 2019 categorized activities into nine major divisions, including paid, unpaid and residual activities (see Box 1).[11]

Box 1. International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS) 2016

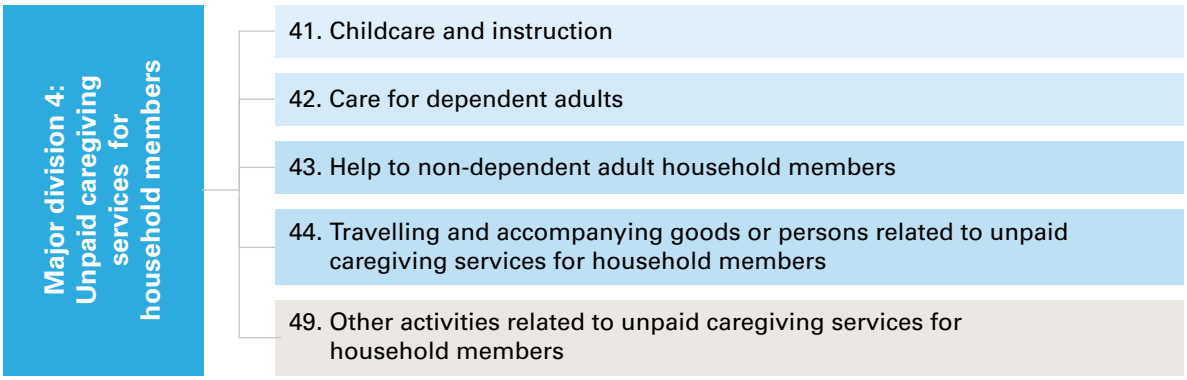
Nine major activity divisions:

1) Employment and related activities
2) Production of goods for own final use
3) Unpaid domestic services for household members
4) Unpaid caregiving services for household members
5) Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work
6) Learning
7) Socializing and communication, community participation and religious practices
8) Culture, leisure, mass-media and sports practices
9) Self-care and maintenance

The primary focus of this paper is on participation and time spent on unpaid domestic services (major division 3) and unpaid caregiving services (major division 4). *Figures 1 and 2* show the further divisions of activities under unpaid domestic services and unpaid caregiving services, respectively.

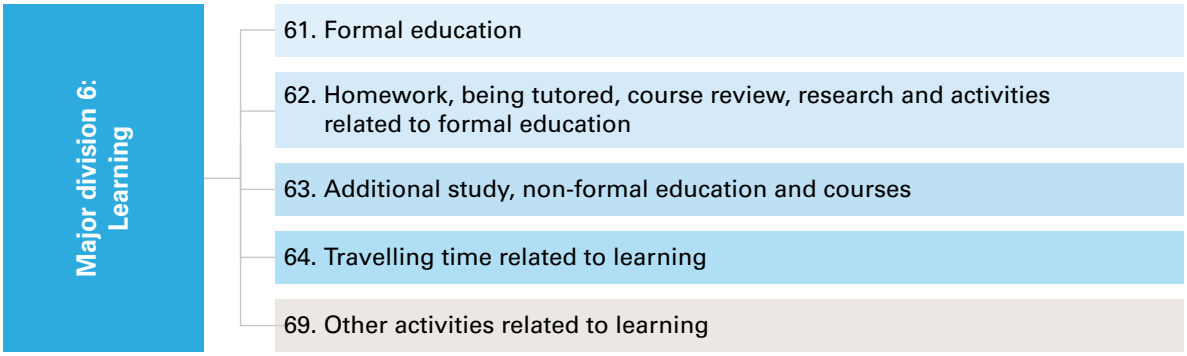
Figure 1: Divisions of activities under unpaid domestic services (ICATUS 2016)

Figure 2: Divisions of activities under unpaid caregiving services (ICATUS 2016)



In addition to domestic and caregiving services, this paper also presents children's engagement in learning (major division 6 of ICATUS), which includes the divisions of activity listed in *Figure 3*.

Figure 3: Divisions of activities under learning (ICATUS 2016)



The analysis that follows considered not only major activities, but all the activities an individual declared in the same time slot. The time to each activity was imputed following the official instructions provided by the National Statistical Office: "If in a time slot more than one activity was performed, the entire duration of that time slot may be allotted equally among the activities performed in that time slot."[12]

3. Participation and time spent by children on unpaid domestic and caregiving services

In this paper, activities are measured at both the extensive (participation rate within the previous 24 hours) and intensive (average time spent in minutes, conditional on participation) margins. Children and adolescents, defined as individuals aged 6–17 years, are categorized into two groups: 6–14 years, representing younger children, and 15–17 years, representing older or adolescent children. This section provides an overview of participation and time spent on domestic and caregiving services among children aged 6–17 years, based on the above-described classification.

3.1 Participation and time spent on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender, age and location

As reported in the first column of *Table 1*, one in five children (20 per cent) participated in unpaid domestic services during the day before the interview. Children's participation rates in such activities vary significantly by gender, location and age.[13] Among girls, the participation rate was 32.9 per cent – almost 24 percentage points higher than among boys (9.1 per cent). The participation rate of children aged 6–17 years in unpaid domestic services was higher in rural areas than in urban areas (21.5 per cent versus 15.7 per cent, respectively). A higher proportion (36.2 per cent) of older children aged 15–17 years participated in unpaid domestic services compared with younger children (13.8 per cent).

Table 1 also shows that only 6.4 per cent of children aged 6–17 years participated in unpaid caregiving services during the day before the interview. Patterns by gender and location are similar to those described above for domestic services. Age differentials in participation in caregiving services show instead a different pattern, with younger children being significantly more likely to participate compared with older children (6.9 per cent versus 5 per cent, respectively). In other words, while participation in domestic services increases with age, participation in caregiving services declines with age. Adolescents are more likely to be engaged in more complex indirect care work, such as meal preparation, dwelling maintenance and laundry, among others. On the contrary, younger children are 'only' asked to watch dependants.

Table 1: Participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender, age and location

	Total	Girls	Boys	Diff.	6–14 yrs	15–17 yrs	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Participation in unpaid domestic services	0.200	0.329	0.091	0.238***	0.138	0.362	-0.225***	0.157	0.215	0.058***
	(0.400)	(0.470)	(0.287)	(0.003)	(0.345)	(0.481)	(0.003)	(0.364)	(0.411)	(0.003)
Participation in unpaid caregiving services	0.064	0.073	0.056	0.017***	0.069	0.050	0.019***	0.053	0.068	0.014***
	(0.244)	(0.260)	(0.230)	(0.002)	(0.254)	(0.218)	(0.002)	(0.224)	(0.251)	(0.002)

Note: For each child, participation indicators are equal to 1 if the child participated in the activity during the day before the interview, 0 otherwise. The table reports the mean, with standard deviation in parentheses. Statistical significance at conventional levels: * 10%; ** 5%; *** 1%.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

Consistent with the patterns observed above for participation, *Table 2* shows that girls spend significantly more time on domestic services than boys. Girls spend, on average, 134 minutes per day on unpaid domestic services – almost 70 per cent more time than boys, who spend 79 minutes per day. Children living in rural areas spend 124 minutes per day and those living in urban areas 107 minutes per day on unpaid domestic services. Younger children (aged 6–14 years) spend less time (95 minutes per day) on such activities than adolescent children aged 15–17 years (124 minutes per day) (see *Figure 4*).

Both boys and girls aged 6–17 years spend, on average, around 95 minutes per day on unpaid caregiving services (see *Table 2*, columns 2 and 3). Location makes a significant difference for time spent on caregiving services. Children living in rural areas and who participate in caregiving spend, on average, 97 minutes per day on this activity, and those living in urban areas spend 85 minutes per day. Among children aged 6–17 years, there are no statistically significant differences by gender or age group in time spent on caregiving services.

Table 2: Time spent on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender, age and location

	Total	Girls	Boys	Diff.	6–14 yrs	15–17 yrs	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Time spent on unpaid domestic services	120.273	133.769	79.264	54.505***	95.438	145.075	-49.637***	107.016	123.745	16.728***
	(110.278)	(116.381)	(75.706)	(1.909)	(87.823)	(123.992)	(1.644)	(101.589)	(112.188)	(2.076)
Time spent on unpaid caregiving services	94.769	94.753	94.795	-0.042	95.386	92.524	2.861	85.358	97.424	12.065***
	(68.099)	(68.084)	(68.130)	(1.862)	(68.512)	(66.553)	(2.262)	(61.014)	(69.744)	(2.239)

Note: Time is expressed in minutes during the day before the interview (conditional on participation). The table reports the mean, with standard deviation in parentheses. Statistical significance at conventional levels: * 10%; ** 5%; *** 1%.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

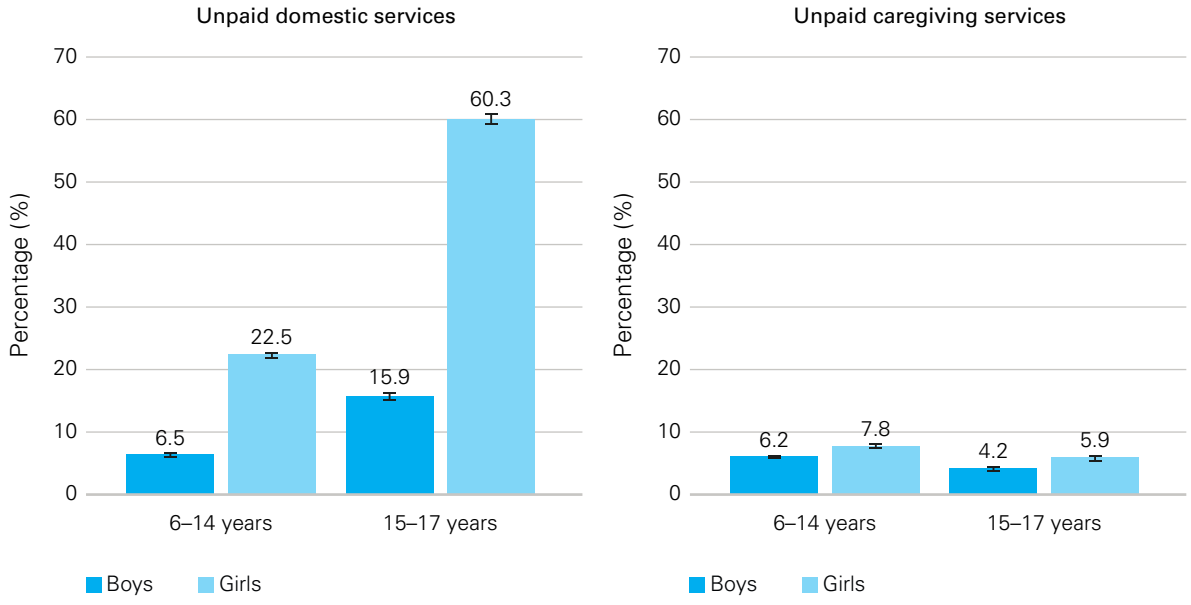
3.2 Participation and time spent on unpaid domestic and caregiving services by gender, within age groups

Figure 4 shows children's participation in unpaid domestic services (left panel) and caregiving services (right panel) by gender, separately for each age group. The figure indicates that, for both domestic and caregiving services, gender differences in participation slightly increase with age.

Regarding domestic services, the left panel shows that, both among both age groups (6–14 years and 15–17 years), participation is about four times higher for girls (22.5 per cent and 60.3 per cent for younger and older children, respectively) than boys (6.5 per cent and 15.9 per cent for younger and older children, respectively).

Regarding caregiving services, the right panel shows smaller gender differences in participation. Among the 15–17 age group, the girls' participation rate in unpaid caregiving services is about 1.4 times higher than the boys' (5.9 per cent and 4.2 per cent for girls and boys, respectively).

Figure 4: Participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender, within age group



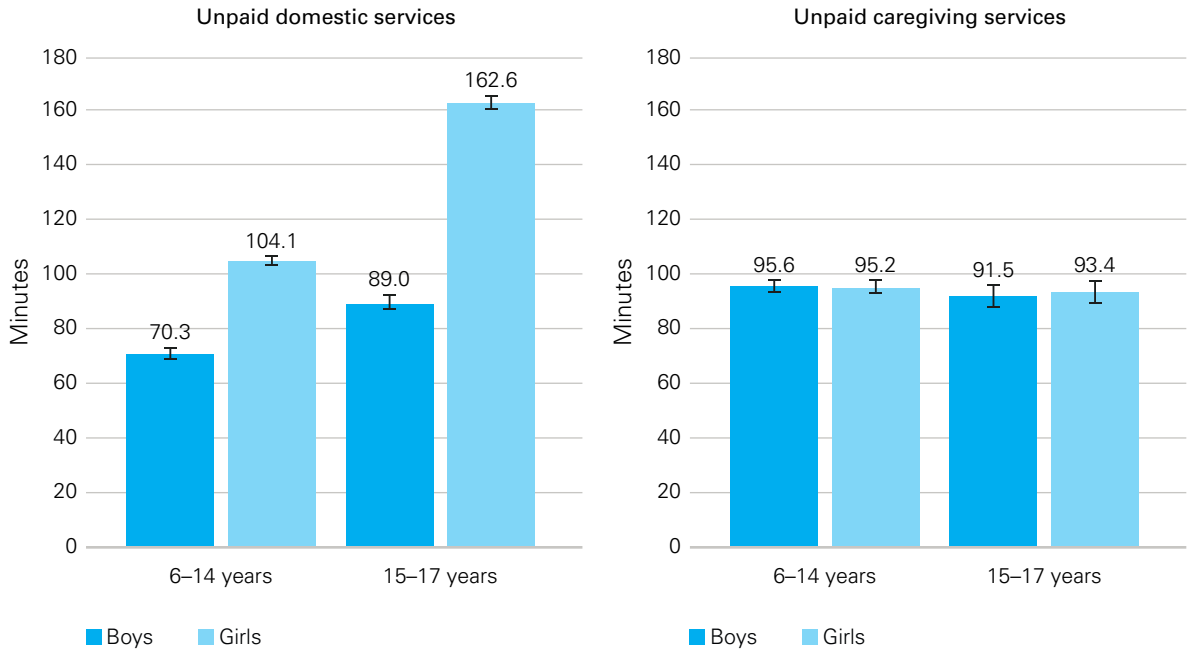
Note: 90 per cent confidence interval represented as vertical lines. All gender differences in participation are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level, both for domestic and caregiving services.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

Figure 5 shows time spent on unpaid domestic services (left panel) and caregiving services (right panel), conditional on participation, by gender and age. The left panel shows that girls spend more time than boys on unpaid domestic services in both age groups. The right panel shows that gender differences in time spent on caregiving services are relatively smaller and reversed for children aged 6–14 years, among which boys spend more time than girls on caregiving.

As shown above for participation, gender differences in the time spent on unpaid domestic and care services increase with age. Regarding domestic services, the left panel indicates that, among children aged 6–14 years, time spent is about 1.5 times higher for girls (104 minutes) than boys (70 minutes); among children aged 15–17 years, gender differentials increase, with girls spending almost twice as much time as boys on domestic services (163 and 89 minutes for boys and girls, respectively). Regarding caregiving services, the right panel shows smaller gender differences in time spent on these services. Overall, time spent on unpaid caregiving services shows less variation by gender and age group, compared with time spent on unpaid domestic work (this is consistent with the pattern observed in *Figure 4* for participation). On average, children aged 6–17 years spend about 95 minutes per day on caregiving services, with little variation by gender and age group.

Figure 5: Time spent on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender, within age group



Note: Time is expressed in minutes during the day before the interview (conditional on participation). Ninety per cent confidence interval represented as vertical lines. Gender differences are significant at the 1 per cent level for domestic services. Time spent on caregiving services is not significantly different by gender at conventional levels.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

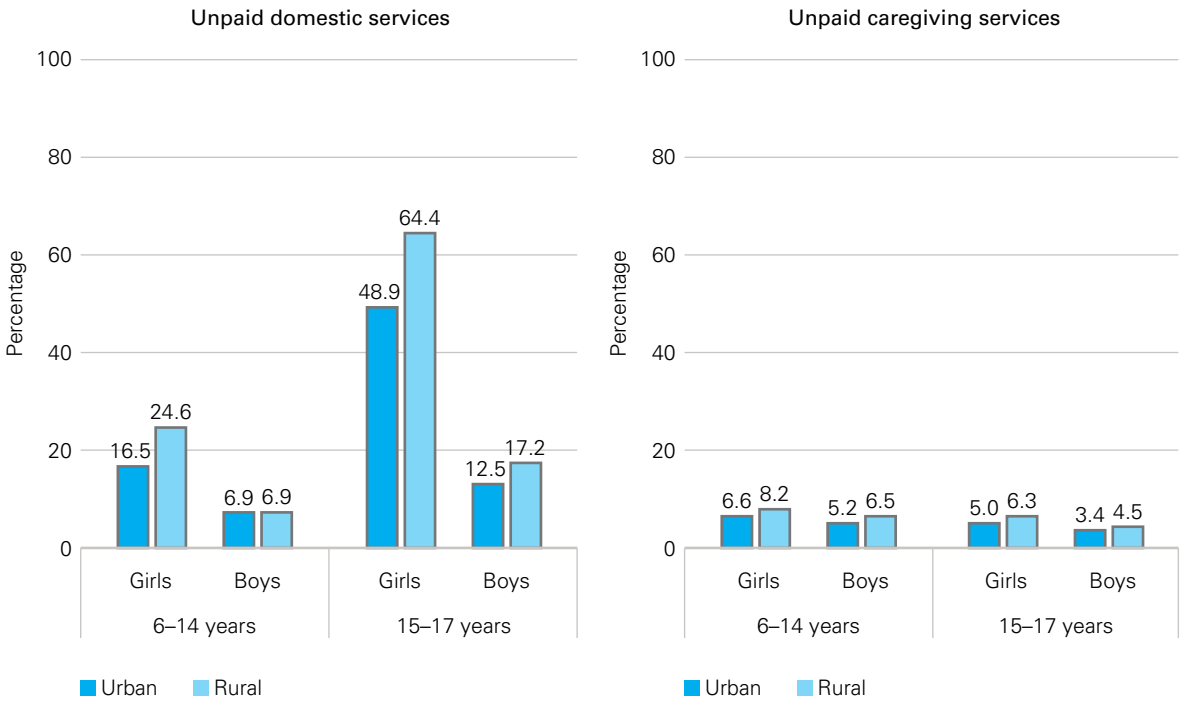
3.3 Participation and time spent by children on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by location, within gender–age groups

Participation rates in unpaid domestic services are significantly higher in rural than in urban areas, across all four gender–age groups (see *Figure 6*, left panel). The same holds for participation in unpaid caregiving services, although the rural–urban differential is smaller in magnitude for these activities (see *Figure 6*, right panel).

Participation in unpaid domestic services is highest among rural adolescent girls aged 15–17 years. Within this group, almost two out of three girls (64.4 per cent) are engaged in unpaid domestic services. This compares with 48.9 per cent of girls of the same age in urban areas. The rural–urban differential in participation rates in domestic services is smaller among adolescent boys (17.2 per cent versus 12.5 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively) (see *Figure 6*, left panel).

The participation rate in unpaid caregiving services is highest among younger rural girls aged 6–14 years. Within this group, 8.2 per cent of girls are engaged in unpaid caregiving services, compared with 6.6 per cent for girls of the same age in urban areas (see *Figure 5*, right panel). The rural–urban differential is smaller for younger boys (6.5 per cent versus 5.2 per cent) compared with younger girls (8.2 per cent versus 6.6 per cent).

Figure 6: Participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by location, age and gender



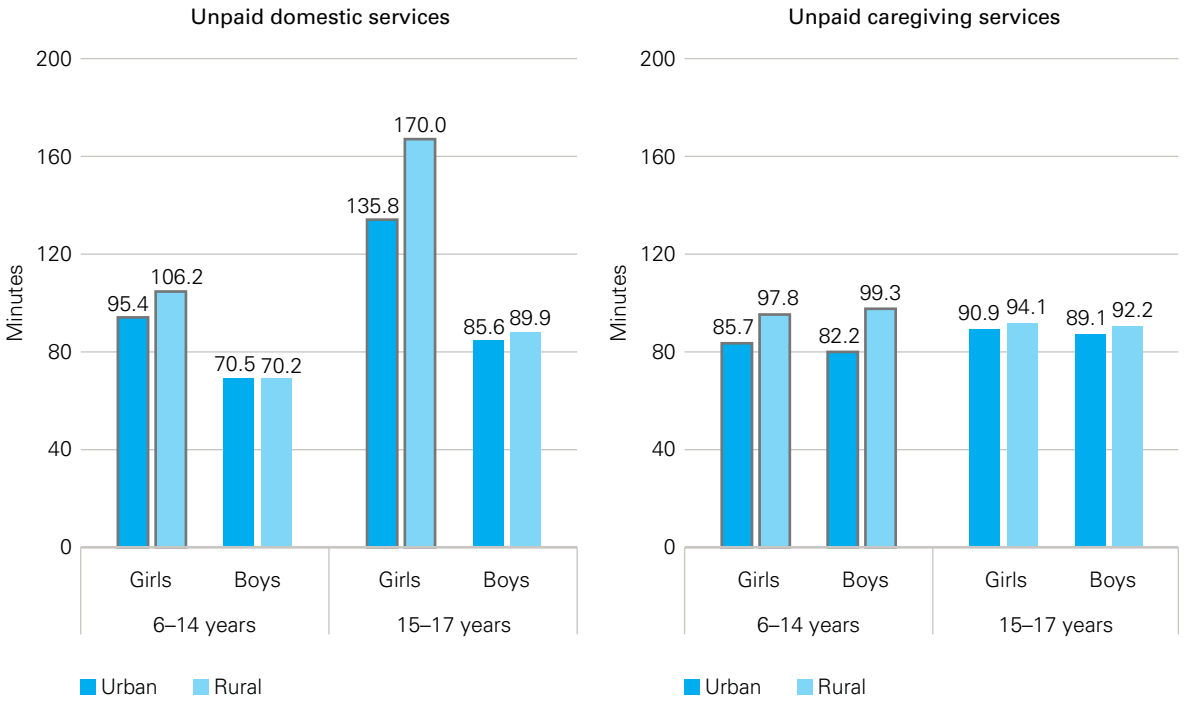
Note: Borders indicate that the difference between urban and rural is statistically significant.
Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

Figure 7 shows time spent on unpaid domestic (left panel) and caregiving (right panel) services, by gender, age and location. While participation was significantly higher in rural than urban areas across all four gender–age groups for both domestic and caregiving services, the rural–urban differential in time spent on these activities presents a more varied pattern, described as follows.

Regarding time spent on unpaid domestic services (left panel), rural–urban differentials are statistically significant among girls only. This holds for both the younger and older age groups. As observed for participation, time spent on domestic services is highest for rural adolescent girls aged 15–17 years, who spent an average of 170 minutes on this activity, compared with 135.8 minutes for girls of the same age in urban areas. In other words, the time spent by older girls on unpaid domestic services is about 25 per cent higher in rural than in urban areas.

Regarding time spent on unpaid caregiving services (right panel), rural–urban differentials are statistically significant among younger children only. This holds among both boys and girls. Time spent on domestic services is highest for rural boys aged 6–14 years, who spent an average of 99.3 minutes on this activity, compared with 82.2 minutes for boys of the same age in urban areas.

Figure 7: Time spent on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by location, age and gender



Note: Time is expressed in minutes during the day before the interview (conditional on participation). Borders indicate that the difference between urban and rural is statistically significant.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

4. Participation and time spent by children on unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by activity

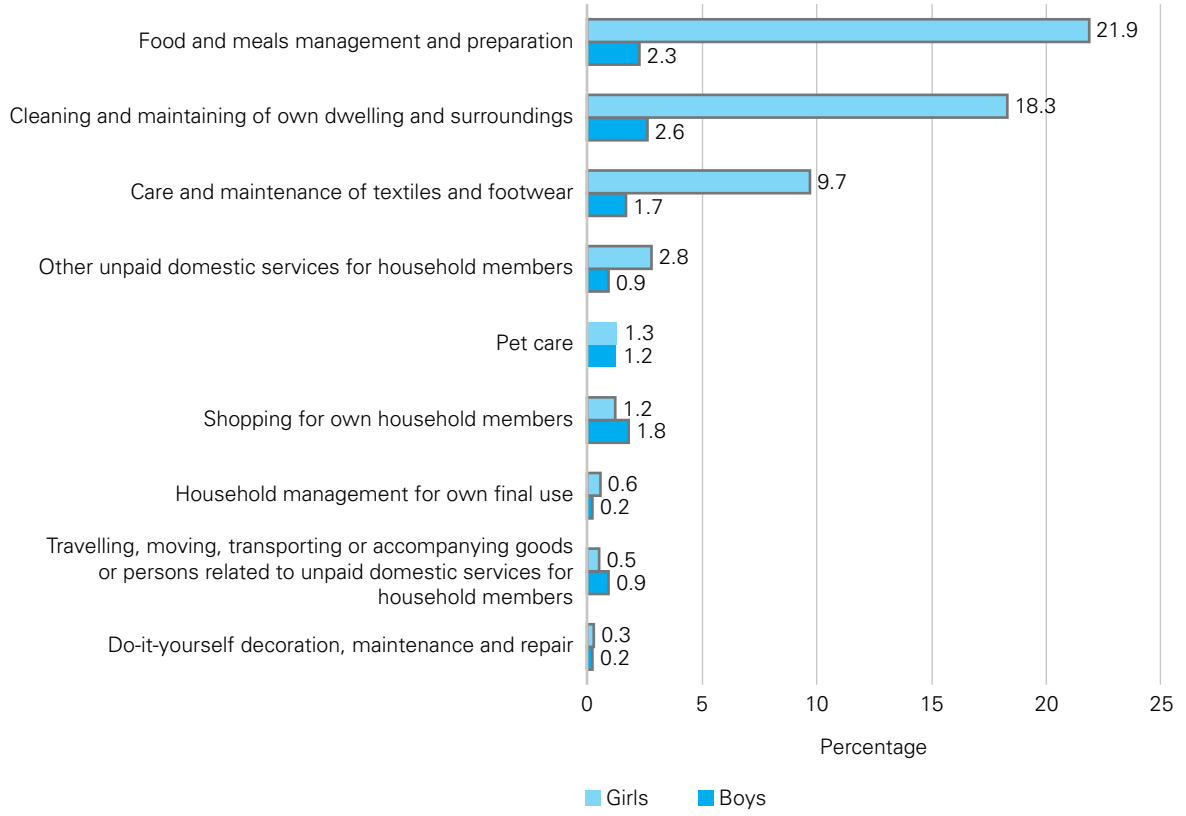
4.1 Participation in different domestic service activities, by gender

Figure 8 reports participation in the nine domestic service activities, separately for boys and girls (activities are ranked based on prevalence among girls, starting from the most common activity). Participation in each of these activities was significantly different between girls and boys, except for pet care, for which there was no statistically significant gender difference in participation.

The most common activity for girls is food and meals management and preparation (21.9 per cent), followed by cleaning and maintaining of own dwelling and surroundings (18.3 per cent), and care and maintenance of textiles and footwear (9.7 per cent). The first two of these activities are also those with the highest gender differential in participation (almost 20 percentage points for food preparation and 16 percentage points for cleaning and maintaining own dwelling). Among boys, the most prevalent activities are cleaning and maintaining own dwelling (2.6 per cent), food and meals management preparation (2.3 per cent) and shopping for members of own household (1.8 per cent).

The participation rate of boys marginally exceeds that of girls in two unpaid domestic activities only: shopping for members of own household (boys 1.8 per cent versus girls 1.2 per cent) and travelling, moving, transporting or accompanying goods or persons related to unpaid domestic services for household members (boys 0.9 per cent versus girls 0.5 per cent). Notably, both entail activities mobility outside the home, and are typically not considered female tasks in many communities.

Figure 8: Participation in the nine domestic service activities, by gender, children aged 6–17 years



Note: Borders indicate that the difference between boys and girls is statistically significant.
Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

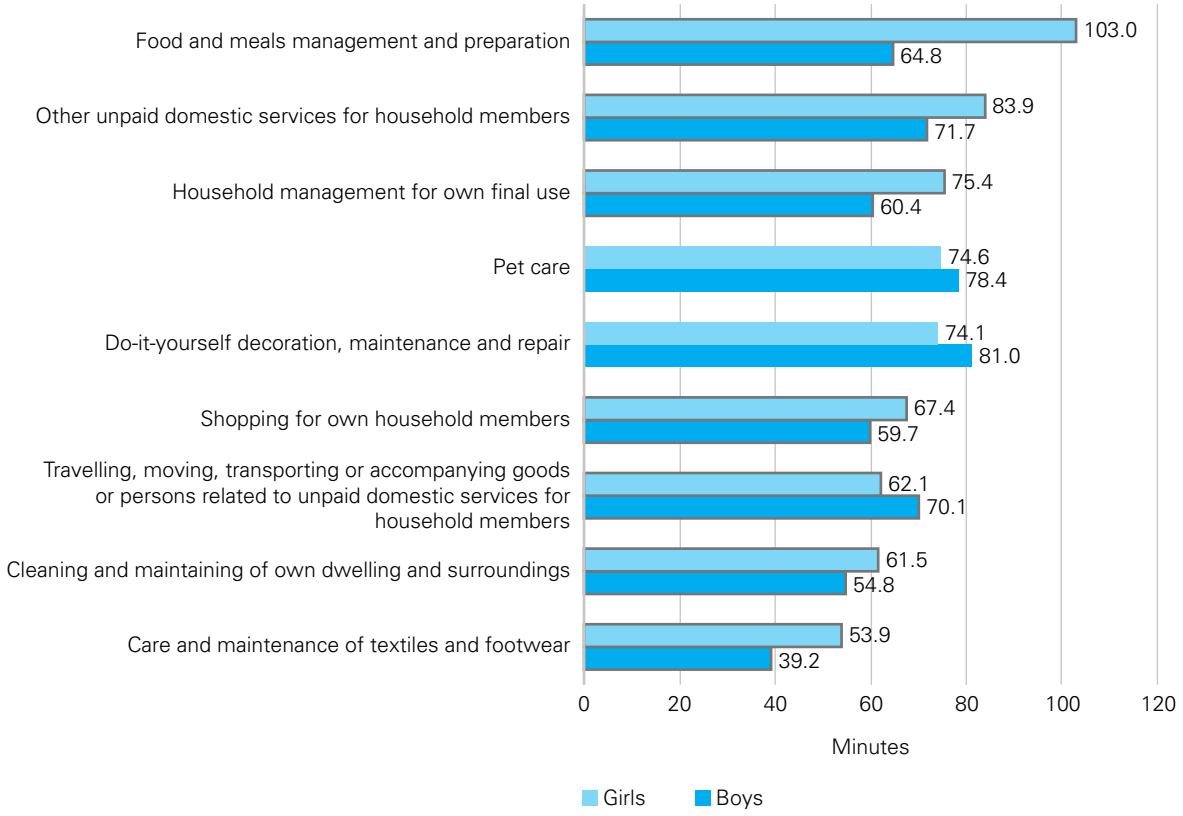
4.2 Time spent on different domestic service activities, by gender

Time spent by girls and boys aged 6–17 years on the nine different domestic service activities is reported in *Figure 9*. This shows a pattern similar to *Figure 8* on participation.

There are statistically significant gender differentials in all activities, except for do-it-yourself decoration, maintenance and repair, and pet care. Gender differentials are especially large for food and meals management and preparation (on which girls spent 103 minutes versus 65 minutes for boys), household management for own final use (about 75 minutes for girls versus 60 minutes for boys), and care and maintenance of textiles and footwear (about 54 minutes for girls versus 39 minutes for boys).

Time spent by boys significantly exceeds that of girls only on one unpaid domestic service activity – that is, travelling, moving, transporting or accompanying goods or persons related to unpaid domestic services for household members.

Figure 9: Time spent on the nine domestic service activities, by gender, children aged 6–17 years



Note: Time is expressed in minutes during the day before the interview (conditional on participation). Borders indicate that the difference between boys and girls is statistically significant.

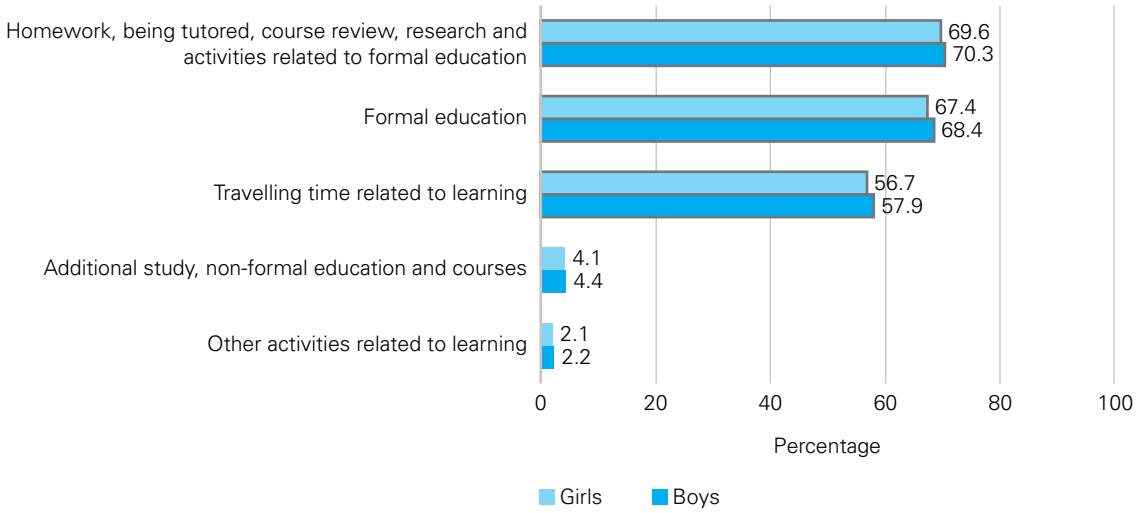
Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

Children aged 6–17 years in rural areas spend significantly more time on the unpaid domestic activity of engaging in the management and preparation of food and meals than those residing in urban areas (results not shown). Similarly, rural children spend more time on the unpaid domestic activity of travelling, moving, transporting or accompanying goods or persons related to unpaid domestic services for household members than children in urban areas. On the other hand, children in urban areas tend to devote more time to the unpaid activity of household management than those in rural areas.

5. Participation and time spent on learning activities

Close to 70 per cent of children are engaged in formal education, with a similar proportion doing homework, being tutored, course review, research and activities related to formal education (see *Figure 10*). While gender differentials for participation in learning activities are relatively smaller compared with those observed above for participation in domestic service activities, in most cases (three out of five) they are statistically significant, with higher participation in learning for boys than girls.

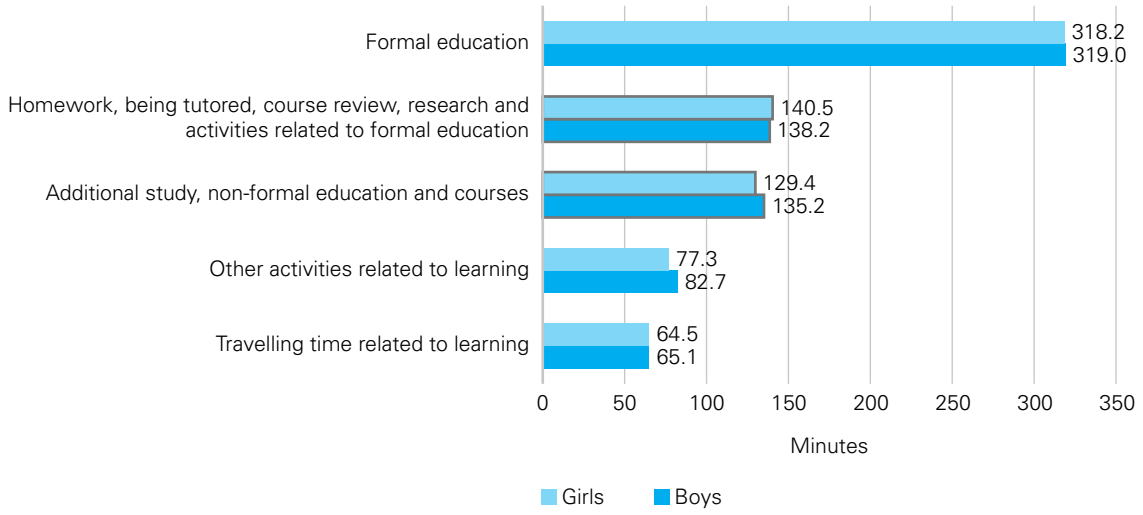
Figure 10: Participation in the five divisions of learning, by gender, children aged 6–17 years



Note: Borders indicate that the difference between girls and boys is statistically significant.
Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

There is little variation in the time spent on the different learning activities by boys and girls (see *Figure 11*). However, gender differences are statistically significant regarding time spent on homework and other activities related to formal education (higher for girls) and time spent on additional study and non-formal education (higher for boys).

Figure 11: Time spent on the five divisions of learning, by gender, children aged 6–17 years



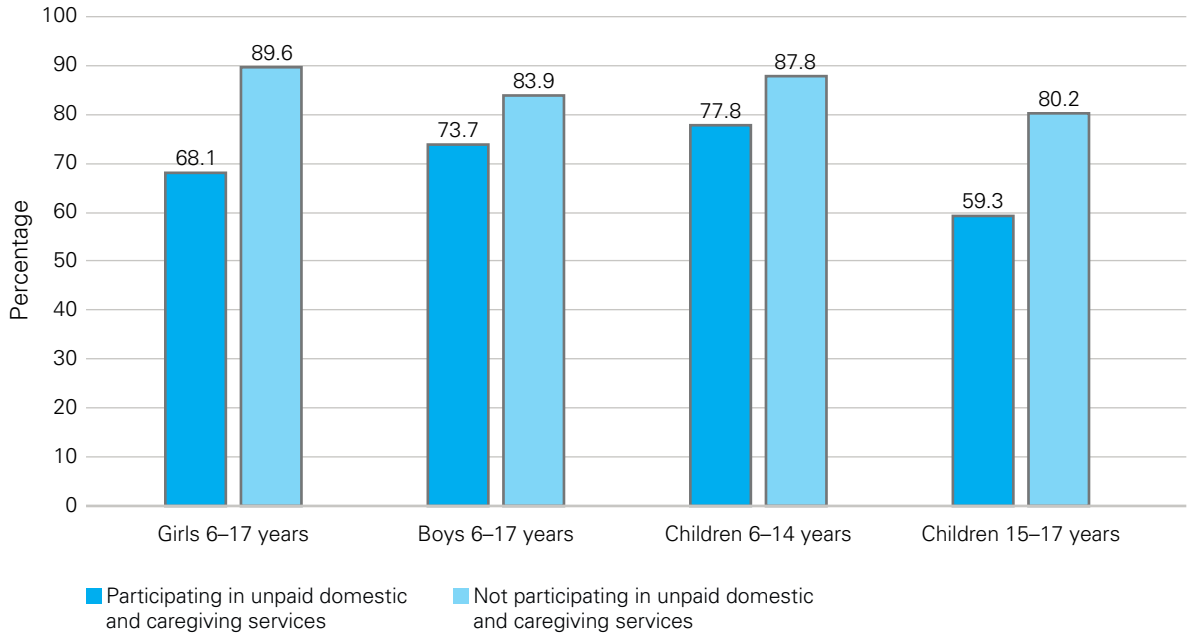
Note: Time is expressed in minutes during the day before the interview (conditional on participation). Borders indicate that the difference between girls and boys is statistically significant.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

There is a strong negative association between unpaid domestic and caregiving activities and learning (see *Figure 12*). Among girls who engage in unpaid domestic and caregiving services, 68 per cent also participate in learning, compared with about 90 per cent of those who do not engage in such activities. Thus, girls involved in unpaid domestic and caregiving services are about 22 percentage points less likely to participate in learning than those who are not involved, representing a reduction in learning participation by about 24 per cent. For boys, 74 per cent of those involved in unpaid domestic and caregiving services participate in learning, while 84 per cent of those not involved do so, making boys engaged in unpaid domestic and caregiving services 10 percentage points less likely to participate in learning. This represents a reduction in learning participation of about 12 per cent.

The above figures suggest that the negative association between participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services and participation in learning is stronger for girls than for boys, which is possibly related to the fact that, conditional on participation, girls spend a significantly longer time on unpaid domestic and caregiving services compared with boys. Similarly, the negative relationship between participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services and participation in learning appears to be relatively stronger for children aged 15–17 years compared with those aged 6–14 years, again possibly related to older children spending more time on unpaid domestic and caregiving services compared with younger ones.

Figure 12: Participation in learning by children's engagement in unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender and age group



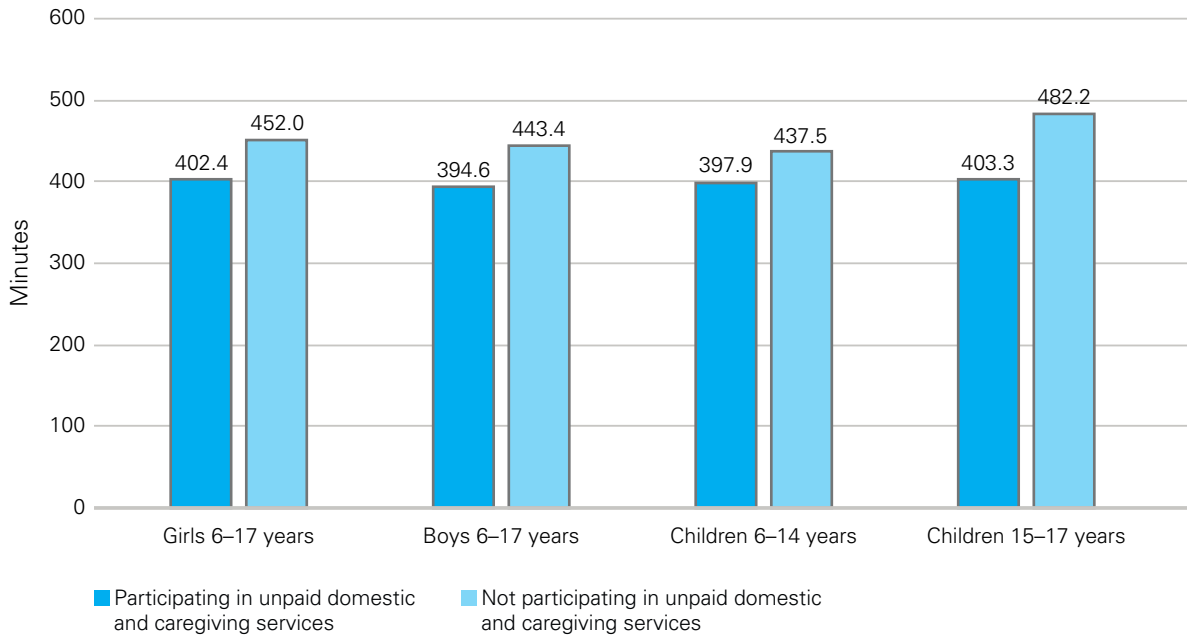
Note: Borders indicate that the difference between children participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services and those not participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services is statistically significant.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

Participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services is also negatively associated with the time that children spend on learning (see *Figure 13*).

On average, boys who are participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services spend 49 minutes less per day and girls 50 minutes less per day on learning activities. In both cases, this corresponds to approximately an 11 per cent reduction in time spent learning compared with children not participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services. Younger children aged 6–14 years who engage in unpaid domestic and caregiving services spend, on average, 40 minutes per day less on learning than those who do not. The difference among adolescent children aged 15–17 years is even more pronounced – those who are engaged in unpaid domestic and caregiving services spend 79 minutes per day less on learning than those who are not engaged in such activities. This corresponds to a 16 per cent reduction in time spent learning for older children engaged in unpaid domestic and caregiving services compared with their peers not engaged in such activities.

Figure 13: Time spent on learning by children's engagement in unpaid domestic and caregiving services, by gender and age group



Note: Time is expressed in minutes during the day before the interview (conditional on participation). Borders indicate that the difference between children participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services and those not participating in unpaid domestic and caregiving services is statistically significant.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from TUS 2019.

6. Discussion

The analysis in this paper showed that children in India, especially girls, bear a high burden in unpaid domestic and caregiving services. One out of five children aged 6–17 years had participated in unpaid domestic services on the day before the interview. A significantly higher percentage of girls (32.9 per cent) engage in unpaid domestic activities compared with boys (9.1 per cent). Participation in unpaid domestic services is significantly higher for children in rural areas (versus children in urban areas) and for older children (versus younger children). The participation of children in caregiving services is much lower than in domestic services. Only 6.4 per cent of children aged 6–17 years had participated in caregiving services during the day before the interview – 7.3 per cent among girls and 5.6 per cent among boys. Like participation in domestic services, participation in caregiving is higher in rural than in urban areas. Regarding age differences in participation, caregiving participation is higher for younger children compared with older ones. In other words, adolescents are more likely to be engaged in more complex domestic tasks (such as meal preparation and dwelling maintenance), while younger children are 'only' asked to watch the dependants.

Considering the above activities, girls spend an average of 134 minutes per day on domestic services, almost 70 per cent more than boys, who spend 79 minutes. Time spent on domestic services is highest for adolescent girls (aged 15–17 years) in rural areas, averaging over two and a half hours (170 minutes) per day.

Gender differences in participation and time spent on domestic services tend to increase with age (see *Figures 4 and 5*) and are highest for adolescents in rural areas (see *Figures 6 and 7*). In rural areas, adolescent girls are almost four times more likely to participate in domestic services and, when they do, spend almost double the time on these activities, compared with boys.

On average, both boys and girls aged 6–17 years spend around 95 minutes (one and a half hours) per day on caregiving. Overall, time spent on caregiving shows less variation by gender and age group, compared with time spent on domestic services, while it shows variation by location for younger children. Among them, those living in rural areas spend significantly more time on caregiving compared with those living in rural areas (see *Figure 7*).

Disaggregated data by activity show that girls mostly engage in cooking and cleaning – tasks that, according to social norms, boys are not expected to engage in. The participation rate of girls (21.9 per cent) in food preparation is much higher than boys (2.3 per cent). Similarly, girls (18.3 per cent) are seven times more likely than boys (2.6 per cent) to engage in cleaning and maintaining their dwellings. The only two domestic service activities in which boys' participation is significantly higher compared with girls' are shopping for own household members and travelling, moving, transporting or accompanying goods or persons. This pattern is consistent with social norms limiting girls' mobility outside their home.

Close to 70 per cent of children are engaged in formal education, and a similar percentage are engaged in related homework, while about 57 per cent travel in relation to learning. While gender differentials in participation in these activities are relatively small, they are mostly statistically significant with higher participation for boys than girls. A similar pattern emerges in relation to time spent on learning activities.

Participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services is negatively associated with the time children have for learning. Among girls, about 90 per cent of those who do not engage in unpaid domestic and caregiving services participate in learning activities, compared with 68 per cent of those who do. For boys, 84 per cent of those not engaged in these activities participate in learning as compared with 74 per cent of those who are. These figures suggest that the negative association between participation in unpaid domestic and caregiving services and participation in learning is stronger for girls than for boys, which is possibly related to the fact that, conditional on participation, girls spend a significantly longer time on unpaid domestic and caregiving services compared with boys.

Boys and girls involved in unpaid domestic and caregiving services spend about 11 per cent less time on learning. Older children aged 15–17 years who are engaged in these services spend about 16 per cent less time on learning than those who are not.

The participation of adolescent girls (aged 15–17 years) in unpaid domestic services especially in rural areas underscores the vulnerabilities they face, as they are often compelled to assist with household chores while their mothers work. Limited access to essential resources like water and fuel in rural areas further exacerbates this burden, with women and girls spending significant time fetching them. The burden of unpaid work is compounded by climate-related risks, financial crises and infrastructure breakdowns, leading to increased toil for women in providing for their families.[14] Traditional gender norms also contribute to the disproportionate involvement of adolescent girls in household tasks, particularly in food and meals management, which can have a negative impact on their health and education.

When it comes to caregiving, the absence of state-provided care mechanisms often leads informal sector workers to enlist their own children for sibling care, despite these children themselves requiring care and attention.[15] Young girls may thus be constrained from engaging in extracurricular activities like sports or music, which are vital for children's well-being. Caregiving activities may affect academic performance and hinder child development. The lower participation of adolescent girls compared with boys in formal education and additional study activities further underscores this issue. Assessing the supply of caregiving facilities in a given region is crucial. Here, the state's role in providing care services becomes vital, enabling parents to allocate their children's time to non-school activities that contribute to cognitive development.

To effectively address concerns regarding girls' unpaid work, it is vital to capture both their market and non-market activities, thus providing a nuanced understanding of time allocation. Moreover, considering the contextual nature of activities is crucial from a policy perspective to grasp their social implications. Assessing the intensity of unpaid work should involve capturing simultaneous and multiple activities to gauge time stress and inform child protection and social protection policies effectively. Emphasizing both school and non-school hours, along with the quality of time

spent post-schooling, is essential. It is also important to understand children's experiences from their perspective, rather than relying solely on adult perceptions. Additionally, understanding the consequences of work on children, and how they interpret and react to them, is necessary, as children may view certain family tasks less favourably.

The long-term policy implications of neglecting the burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving services on children are substantial. Adolescent girls in particular may face challenges transitioning to the adult labour market due to domestic and childcare responsibilities. Recognizing and addressing this work undertaken by adolescents and children is crucial for identifying the invisible constraints hindering girls' education participation and understanding the impact of domestic work on their well-being.

Several policy actions are needed to support a change in social norms and reduce the burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving services on India's children, especially girls. Firstly, investment is needed in services that reduce household domestic work burdens in rural areas. Such investments include access to water, electrification, roads and infrastructure, and safe public transportation, among others. This can reduce the amount of time that rural households in particular need to spend on this kind of work. Social protection policies, such as cash transfers, can also support families economically, reducing the need for children's labour at home. It is also crucial to expand access to affordable childcare services that can alleviate the burden on children who often care for younger siblings. The government should also implement programmes that promote gender equality in household responsibilities, encouraging boys to participate equally in domestic tasks. Finally, norm-change interventions with parents and caregivers, community leaders and other stakeholders, in addition to mass and social media campaigns, have the potential to change societal attitudes and norms about the division of labour within households and emphasize that education is a priority for all children.[16] These combined efforts can help to ensure that children, particularly girls, have more time to focus on their education and personal development.

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