

SUMMARY of the Article “A Caring Economy,” by Samia Liaquat Ali Khan, Dawn, July 25th, 2024

The article “A Caring Economy” by Samia Liaquat Ali Khan, published in Dawn on July 25th, 2024, addresses the disproportionate burden of caregiving placed on women and its impact on their participation in the labor force, particularly in South Asia. The World Economic Forum’s 2024 Global Gender Gap Report highlights how this imbalance caused female labor force participation rates to drop during and immediately after the Covid pandemic, with only recent improvements. Research by the World Bank indicates that extended maternity leave often leads to women not returning to work, while extended paternity leave for men positively influences women’s re-entry into the labor market. In Pakistan, many companies are hesitant to employ women due to perceived short-term financial costs and the need for ‘special’ treatment in a male-dominated environment. Women face numerous barriers to entering and staying in the workforce, including discriminatory job advertisements and interview practices, societal expectations regarding marriage and motherhood, and lack of support at home. As a result, women often leave the workforce, leading to a significant gender disparity in senior management positions. The article argues that societal perceptions of gender roles need fundamental reconfiguration, emphasizing the undervalued but crucial nature of care work. Economists Naila Kabeer and Nancy Folbre have highlighted the economic productivity of care work, which enhances human capabilities but is poorly compensated. The article suggests rewarding men for caregiving roles and providing better economic opportunities for women. Policies like flexible work hours, child care options, mandated paternity leave, and encouraging men’s involvement in caregiving are essential. The article cites successes in rural communities where women’s economic participation has improved their status and confidence. The author concludes by sharing a powerful anecdote of a woman in Tharparkar who educated her seven children

through her earnings, showcasing the potential for women's empowerment through economic activity.

Easy/Short SUMMARY:

The article talks about how women often take care of children and the elderly more than men, which affects their ability to work. This was especially true during and after the Covid pandemic. In places like South Asia, this inequality is very noticeable. Research shows that if men take more paternity leave, women are more likely to return to work. However, many companies in Pakistan still hesitate to hire women because of the costs and need for special treatment in a male-dominated workplace. Women face many challenges when trying to get or keep a job, like unfair job ads, societal expectations about marriage and motherhood, and lack of support at home. This results in fewer women in senior positions. The article suggests that society needs to change how it views gender roles and value the important caregiving work that women do. It recommends policies like flexible work hours, child care options, and paternity leave to help. The article ends with a story of a woman in Tharparkar who supported her children's education with her earnings, showing how empowering women economically can make a big difference.

SOLUTIONS of The Problem:

Educational Programs for Employers and Employees

Implement programs to educate employers and employees about gender equality, the importance of shared caregiving responsibilities, and the benefits of a diverse workforce.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Encourage and mandate flexible work hours and remote work options to help women balance their work and caregiving responsibilities.

Paternity Leave Policies

Mandate and promote paternity leave to ensure men share caregiving



responsibilities, enabling women to re-enter and stay in the workforce.

Child Care Facilities

Provide on-site child care facilities at workplaces and subsidize child care services to support working parents.

Anti-Discrimination Training

Offer regular training to eliminate unconscious bias in job advertisements, interviews, and workplace practices to create a more inclusive environment.

Support Networks for Women

Establish support networks and mentorship programs for women in the workforce to provide guidance, share experiences, and build confidence.

Community Awareness Campaigns

Launch campaigns to change societal perceptions of gender roles, highlighting the value of caregiving and the need for gender equality in economic participation.

Government Incentives for Inclusive Practices

Provide tax breaks and incentives for companies that implement gender-inclusive policies and practices, encouraging more businesses to follow suit.

Economic Empowerment Programs for Women

Develop programs to provide women with the skills, training, and financial support needed to start their businesses or gain employment, particularly in rural areas.

Research and Data Collection

Conduct ongoing research to monitor the impact of gender-inclusive policies and identify areas for improvement, ensuring that efforts are effective and based on

evidence.

IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the Article:

- The World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report highlights the disproportionate burden of caregiving on women.
- Female labor force participation rates dipped during and immediately after the Covid pandemic.
- Extending paternity leave for men has a positive correlation with women re-entering the labor market.
- Women make up only six percent of senior officials and senior managers in Pakistan.
- Care work is highly productive but greatly undervalued, according to economists Naila Kabeer and Nancy Folbre.

MCQs from the Article:

1. What does the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report highlight?

- A. The decline in male labor force participation rates
- B. The disproportionate burden of caregiving on women**
- C. The rise in female senior managers in Pakistan
- D. The equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities between men and women

2. According to World Bank research, what positively correlates with women re-entering the labor market?

- A. Extending maternity leave
- B. Extending paternity leave for men**
- C. Reducing work hours for women
- D. Increasing salaries for women

3. What percentage of senior officials and senior managers in Pakistan are women, according to the article?

- A. 10%
- B. 6%**
- C. 15%
- D. 20%

4. Who are the economists mentioned in the article that have contributed to understanding the care economy?

- A. Amartya Sen and Esther Duflo
- B. Naila Kabeer and Nancy Folbre**
- C. Muhammad Yunus and Joseph Stiglitz
- D. Janet Yellen and Elinor Ostrom

5. What key solution is suggested for creating a more inclusive workforce?

- A. Mandating paternity leave**
- B. Increasing working hours
- C. Reducing salaries
- D. Limiting women's participation in the workforce

VOCABULARY:

1. **Disproportionate** (بے تناسب): Too large or too small in comparison with something else.
2. **Burden** (بوج): A load, typically a heavy one.
3. **Normative** (معاقد): Establishing, relating to, or deriving from a standard or norm.
4. **Patriarchal** (مردانه): Relating to a society controlled by men.
5. **Attrition** (تلاطم): The process of reducing something's strength or effectiveness through sustained attack or pressure.
6. **Reconfiguration** (تعمیر): The arrangement of parts or elements in a different form, figure, or combination.
7. **Perception** (دراک): The ability to see, hear, or become aware of something

through the senses.

8. **Monetising** (پیسے میں تبدیل کرنا): Convert into or express in the form of currency.
9. **Intersectionality** (تقاطعیت): The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender.
10. **Feminist** (نسوانیت): Relating to or supporting feminism.
11. **Productivity** (تولیدی صلاحیت): The state or quality of producing something.
12. **Capabilities** (توانا): The power or ability to do something.
13. **Compensated** (پیسے میں معاوضہ دینا): Give (someone) something, typically money, in recognition of loss, suffering, or injury.
14. **Inclusive** (شمولیت): Including all the services or items normally expected or required.
15. **Flexi-timing** (تعمیراتی وقت): Flexible working hours.
16. **Paradigm** (نمونہ): A typical example or pattern of something.
17. **Subsidize** (معاوضہ دینا): Support (an organization or activity) financially.
18. **Empowerment** (تعمیراتی طاقت): Authority or power given to someone to do something.
19. **Discrimination** (تفریق): The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people.
20. **Taboos** (تعمیراتی ممنوعیت): A social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice.

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Samia Liaquat Ali Khan

THE World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report provides some information on how the burden of caring for children and the elderly, is borne disproportionately by women. This is one of the reasons why global female labour force participation rates dipped during and immediately after the Covid pandemic, and have only recently risen back to pre-pandemic levels. While there are economies where this burden of care is being shared more equally between women and men, there are regions where inequality is much higher. South Asia is one such region.

World Bank research finds that where women take extended maternity leave, there is a stronger chance that they will not re-join the labour force. However, they also find that extending paternity leave to men has a positive correlation with women re-entering the labour market. As companies in Pakistan think more thoroughly about how to enhance inclusive workplaces, such research and learning becomes critical. A bird's eye view of various industries, however, shows that while there are some focused on developing their female cohort and talent, many still do not believe the evidence that employing women makes good business sense. The short-term financial costs of integration within a largely male work environment, and the perception of having to give female employees 'special' treatment holds them back.

Women face a disproportionate number of barriers when trying to enter or remain in the workforce. Local research on the jobs market has found that in many cases, the way jobs are advertised and interviews taken, are plagued with discrimination. This may not be intentional, but is a result of the normative patriarchal environment which governs our thought processes and behaviours. The more intentional discrimination occurs when women are not considered the 'right' fit for the job, and/or assumptions are made about when they will get

married/ pregnant and eventually leave the company.

The difficulties women face once married, and lack of support offered within their home environment, often means that these assumptions turn out to be true.

Retaining women in the corporate workforce is difficult and the attrition rate is very high. Even where companies try to hire equal numbers of men and women in entry-level positions, they find this ratio skewing back to favour men because many more women drop out of the workforce. Fast forward 10-15 years, when that cohort reaches positions of seniority, the ratio between the sexes drops even further. According to the Global Gender Gap Index, women make up only six per cent of senior officials and senior managers in Pakistan today. The situation is dire.

Women face a disproportionate number of barriers when trying to enter the workforce.

Facilitating women's entry or re-entry into the workforce requires some fundamental reconfiguration in society's perception of gender roles. Men are considered the primary breadwinners. This sense of responsibility is fed into their psyche from a young age, and must be a scary burden to carry. Women are not made to feel that they need to bear any economic responsibilities. But they are made to feel that they are burdens. Their roles as wives, mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law, and the responsibilities they bear are given no value. But, this is exactly where the care economy develops. Naila Kabeer and Nancy Folbre, both widely respected economists, have broadened the current debate on what should be determinants of growth by monetising care. Their field of feminist economics brings the intersectionality of inequality, power dynamics and social and environmental benefits into reconceptualising economic theory.

Folbre has made some important contributions in our better understanding of the care economy. She has identified that care work is highly productive, yet greatly undervalued. Caring for children, elders and others leads to enhanced human capabilities which are at the centre of economic productivity. The benefits are available to society as a whole, but carers are either not compensated (in monetary terms) or compensated very little for this work. If women stop providing this service, the cost to the economy and to society cannot be estimated.



SUMMARY of the Article A Caring Economy, by Samia

Liaquat Ali Khan

Pakistani society cares for its elders. We have the opportunity to break a negative paradigm by using this traditional value. How? By creating avenues which reward men for taking more active roles as caregivers (within the home), and simultaneously giving women and girls better economic opportunities and choices. And by making national policy that enables a more inclusive determination of growth and the goal of equitable progress. At the very least, companies and government offices should provide flexi-timing and child care options to male and female employees. Paternity leave should be mandated. Males should be encouraged to take time out to care for sick parents. And women should be encouraged to take up economic activity. This is where government and corporate policies become essential and the first step towards breaking taboos.

Some of the biggest successes I see when it comes to changing the paradigm have been in extremely poor rural communities. When women are perceived as earners, their status within the home and the community changes. When they understand their rights and find their voices, they become confident and powerful.

My most humbling, yet elevating, experience was in Tharparkar, a few years ago, when I was talking to some women in a remote village. They had received training and financial support to become economically active and over time their incomes had increased sustainably. We talked about business and family, social challenges and their thoughts on the future.

One woman, who had been quiet for the most part, turned to me to speak. Her well-lined face reflected the harshness of living in a remote desert community, but her eyes were sparkling. With purpose and pride she responded, "I have put all my seven children through school with my earnings, not my husband, me". That, readers, is true greatness.

The writer is an independent development professional and impact adviser with over 25 years of experience designing and managing programmes to improve people's lives.

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