

# Age and Gender Bias in Workloads During the Lifecycle: Evidence from Rural Ghana

by Raquel Tsukada and Elydia Silva, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth

**This One Pager** discusses how age and gender affect workloads during the lifecycle of women and men in rural Ghana. We argue that the division of labour seems to sustain gender-income differences and intergenerational poverty. The workload is disproportionately carried by women, while children enter the labour force prematurely and the elderly work beyond retirement.

According to economic theories, individuals consume a constant percentage of the present value of their lifetime income, which is based on their forward-looking expectations. Savings are made during the economically productive period, and dissaving happens during childhood and retirement. Low-income individuals have a high average propensity to consume. Time constraints, especially during the productive ages, hamper their ability to increase expected permanent income. Consequently, individuals in low-income households tend to extend their working life from childhood to old age in an attempt to increase their consumption level.

Using data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey, we find that children aged 10 and below spend significant hours a week working. A 60 year-old woman still works about 50 hours a week (figure a). The high dependency ratio, lack of formal employment, weak social protection and absence of pension schemes for most rural households extend the heavy workload until the very last years of life.

The data also reveal an unambiguous gender bias in time use. On average, women work disproportionately longer hours than men during their lifetimes. The high intensity of domestic unpaid work restricts their time availability to perform remunerated activities. Women therefore tend to have a reduced savings capacity. Their peak workload reaches 80 hours a week during their most productive age (around 30), while men, peaking around the same age, work about 50 hours a week.

Disaggregating total work into domestic (unpaid) and market (paid) work, we uncover another interesting fact. The disproportionate work burden on women coincides with the period when they bear their first children and take on the traditional demanding female role in parenthood. Men's lifelong workload peaks in the same age range as does women's, but this is because men spend longer hours at paid work (figure b). Men are thus able to substantially increase their permanent income during their most productive age.

The gender bias starts at school age (7–14). There is no significant difference between the proportion of boys and girls attending school, but the time use of children reveals an important story that is masked by the gender-unbiased enrolment rates. School-age girls work increasingly longer hours than boys. They have less time available for homework and self-study. Most of the workload consists of unpaid domestic chores (figure c). Hence the ability of women to earn income seems to be gender-biased from childhood, when girls' accumulation of human capital is neglected and the potential for higher income is foreclosed. The upshot is lower female intra-household bargaining power, which points towards persistent female time poverty and further income poverty (see also Costa et al., 2009).

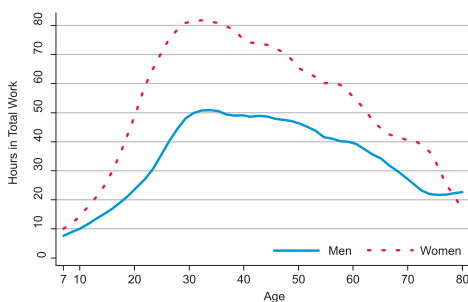
In the context of slow cultural change in intra-household gender roles, policies to empower women should primarily address alternatives for reducing domestic work. Lessening the burden of domestic work on women requires improving access to basic infrastructure and making childcare facilities available. Excluding children from the labour market and investing in human capital at an early age help their savings capacity and protection during old age.

**Reference:**

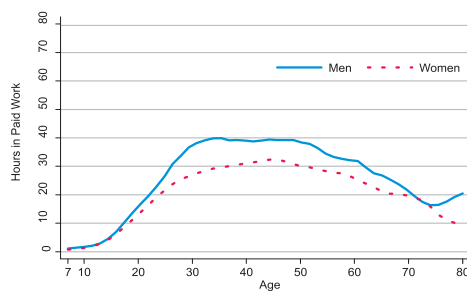
Costa, J., D. Hailu, E. Silva and R. Tsukada (2009). 'The Implications of Water and Electricity Supply for the Time Allocation of Women in Ghana', International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth Working Paper Number 59. Brasilia, IPC-IG.

**Workload During the Lifecycle of Women and Men in Rural Ghana**

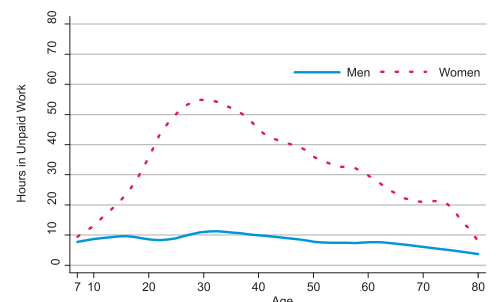
a. Total Work



b. Paid Work



c. Unpaid Work



Note: Non-linear estimations using Ghana Living Standards Survey 4 (1998–1999).

