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Economic Development and Time Devoted to Direct Unpaid Care Activities:

- An Analysis of the Harmonized European Time Use Survey (HETUS) –

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A growing literature emphasizes the distinctive characteristics of care, its implications for the development of human capabilities, and its centrality to the process of social reproduction. Yet relatively little attention has been devoted to the impact of economic development on the demand for and supply of care. The advent of time-use diary surveys in a broad range of countries offers the opportunity to answer an important question: How do the institutional transformations and increases in per capita market income associated with economic development affect temporal demands for direct unpaid care of dependents such as children, the sick, and the elderly?

In this paper, we address this broad question in both theoretical and empirical terms, focusing on a cross-sectional analysis of fifteen European countries which vary considerably in terms of average levels of income and education, as well as child care policies. We begin with a summary of the many reasons why analysis of care for dependents is relevant to economic development. The conventional wisdom suggests that time devoted to unpaid work tends to decline in the course of economic development—a process often defined in terms of an increase in the relative importance of the market economy. Yet empirical evidence suggests that unpaid work devoted to the direct and indirect care of family members remains remarkably and persistently important within the advanced capitalist countries. (See Box 1 for definitions of unpaid and paid work, direct and indirect care). The composition of unpaid work seems to shift in the course of economic development, with a decline in the relative share of time devoted to housework and an increase in the relative importance of time devoted to direct care of children and other dependents.

We focus our attention on analysis of cross-sectional differences in unpaid direct care of children. Like other recent analyses of trends over time in a variety of European countries using the Multinational Time Use Survey (MTUS) (Bianchi et al., 2007, Ch. 9; Guryan et al., 2008) we find a positive association between level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, the amount of time devoted to child care, and time devoted to child care as a percentage of all unpaid work. We also show that higher educational levels are associated with greater parental time devoted to child care. However, we devote less attention to individual-level differences than to analysis of factors that could help explain international differences, such as the structure of

employment, differences in household structure (particularly co-residence of adults other than parents who may provide care) and the impact of public policies such as child care provision.

We situate our analysis within a broad overview of the impact of economic development on the social organization of care. We call attention to conceptual and methodological problems that complicate comparative analysis of time-diary survey data. We provide an overview of the most important factors affecting the demand for and supply of care in the course of economic development. We also conduct a descriptive analysis of the relationship between GDP, women's paid employment, household structure, education, and time devoted to direct child care activities using the Harmonized European Time Use Surveys (HETUS) for fifteen European countries.

Why Care is Relevant to Economic Development

Mainstream development economists continue to define economic growth in terms of conventional measures such as paid labor force participation and income per capita. A new paradigm of feminist research, however, emphasizes the need for empirical analysis of time devoted to unpaid household work. The impact of unpaid work on household living standards can be treated either as a form of implicit income (an addition to household market income) or an increase in household consumption (an addition to market purchases).

Feminists protested the failure to measure and value women's unpaid work in the U.S. as early as 1878 (Folbre, 1991). Margaret Reid's classic *Economics of Household Production*, published in 1934, clearly explained the logic of valuation, and New Zealand activist Marilyn Waring (1988) effectively publicized its international relevance. Modern neoclassical theory acknowledges the theoretical importance of household production (Becker, 1965; Gronau, 1973). Within the Marxian literature, the so-called "domestic labor" debates revolved around this topic (Seccombe, 1974; Harrison, 1973). Yet efforts to impute a value to unpaid work and include consideration of it within national income accounts remain intermittent and largely unnoticed (Eisner, 1989; Abraham and Mackie, 2004).

Conventional measures of growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) offer a biased and incomplete measure of improvements in living standards. When time is reallocated from non-market to market activities, the impact of possible reductions in the value of unpaid work is overlooked. For this reason, GDP growth can overstate growth in the production of total goods and services. On the other hand, improvements in household technology—such as microwave

ovens, vacuum cleaners, and online shopping can yield increases in productivity of unpaid work (Folbre and Wagman, 1993; Wagman and Folbre, 1996). For this reason, GDP growth can understate real growth in production. Failure to measure the value of goods and services produced outside the money economy distorts measures of inequality in living standards as well as levels and rates of economic growth (Folbre, 2008a).

Children represent one of the most important "outputs" of household production. Time devoted to direct activities of nurturance and care represents a contribution to the human capital that promotes economic development (Folbre, 2008b). The unpaid direct care devoted to nurturance and care of other dependents also represents an important dimension of social reproduction. As Diane Elson (1991) has persuasively argued, neoliberal development strategies often seek to offload the costs of social reproduction into the unpaid sector, assuming that the supply of unpaid labor is infinitely elastic. But in many advanced capitalist countries, including Italy, Spain, Japan, and Korea, birth rates have declined to far-below replacement levels. These declines seem more closely related to work-family policies and other economic variables than to women's employment per se (McDonald, 2000; Bettio and Villa, 1998). As a recent OECD report (2006) emphasizes, levels of maternal employment in Europe are positively related to state policies that subsidize care provision, which, in turn, are positively related to birth rates.

Another important reason for careful attention to unpaid work in general and care work in particular lies in its implications for gender inequalities. Most efforts to assess the relative position of women, including the Gender Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure developed by the United Nations, focus on women's participation in the market economy relative to men. Yet increases in women's market income can be countervailed by increases in their responsibility for dependents (as with increases in the proportion of families with children maintained by women alone) or by an increase in their total working hours (Folbre, 2006a). Some recent international comparisons suggest that differences in the total working hours of men and women decline over the course of economic development (Burda et al. 2007). Such comparisons are strongly affected by both the definition and measurement of unpaid work, as well as cultural norms and public policies. A closer look at one category of unpaid work—the direct unpaid care of children--promises some insights into larger trends.

Conceptual and Measurement Problems

Care work means different things to different people. It can be defined in terms of who it benefits (dependents vs. others), the social relations in which it takes place (e.g. unpaid family labor vs. paid employment), or the nature of the labor process (involving personal interaction and emotional connection or not). Other papers commissioned by UNRISD have used the term "unpaid care work" to refer to unpaid direct and indirect care activities (care of family members and housework) (Razavi, 2007; Budlender, 2008b). In this paper, we focus more narrowly on "direct unpaid care activities" (such as feeding a person, bathing a person, reading aloud to a child, or teaching a child) and on *supervisory responsibility* for family members that constrains the time, attention, or availability of a caregiver.

We reserve the term "indirect unpaid care activities" for food preparation, housework, and shopping activities that represent an important input into care provision (termed "household maintenance" in Razavi, 2008:18). It is important to note that wage employment undertaken for the purpose of purchasing inputs into care also represents an indirect care activity, and that many direct care activities provided through the market (such as publicly provided child care or elder care) also fall under the rubric of care (Folbre, 2008c). These nomenclatural and definitional issues bear on the important issue of substitutability between market and non-market provision of services (Himmelweit, 2000).

Unlike unpaid indirect care provision, direct care activities often entail close personal relationships for which market-purchased services offer only a partial substitute. These activities are by their very nature labor-intensive and emotionally complex. Economic characteristics such as education, earnings, and family income seem to have different effects on these activities than on more impersonal forms of unpaid work. Econometric analysis of data from the American Time Use Survey shows that wages have a positive effect on time devoted to child care but a negative effect on time devoted to housework (Kimmel and Connelly, 2007). Almost equally surprising, econometric analysis of European time use data shows that wages seem to exert no significant effect on time devoted to child care (Hallberg and Klevmarken, 2003; Kalenkoski et al., 2005).

Neoclassical economists often define work as an activity conducted only for the purpose of producing goods and services or earning income. From this perspective, child care, which often yields direct satisfaction to the care provider, should not be considered "work." Indeed,

Kimmel and Connelly (2007) argue that child care should be considered an activity somewhat intermediate between work and leisure. But studies of reported happiness combined with time use show that many activities, including paid work, generate happiness and satisfaction (Juster, 1985; Krueger, 2007). Subjective assessments of distinct time-use activities yield interesting results. However, they should not be used to define what is “work” and what is not.

Most time-use researchers rely on the “third-party criterion” developed long ago by Margaret Reid. If you can, in principle, pay someone to engage in an activity on your behalf, it represents work (regardless of whether you enjoy it or not). This criterion is not without problems of its own. Some activities, such studying or exercising to improve one’s health, can’t be performed by someone else, but many people would decline to refer to these as leisure. Similarly, sleep and other forms of personal care seem to fall outside the standard work/leisure dichotomy.

An additional complication arises from the definition of “activities” that provides the basis for time-use surveys. The "primary activity" is typically designated in response to the question "what were you doing?" The "secondary activity" is typically designated as a response to the question "what else were you doing at the same time?" But child care is not merely an activity—it is also a *responsibility* that constrains adult allocation of time even when no direct care activity is being performed (Budig and Folbre, 2004). Many paid jobs, ranging from the dramatic task of firefighters to the mundane task of sales, pay workers “to be available” whether or not they are actively engaged in activities (such as fighting fires or interacting with customers).

This limitation of conventional time-use surveys raises a problem of construct validity--“the extent to which an observed measure reflects the underlying theoretical construct that the investigator has intended to measure” (Andrews, 1989:393). Michael Bittman offers a particularly poignant example that emerged from a focus-group discussion with Australian respondents providing care for a sick or disabled family member: a mother who used a vacuum aspirator to suction mucus out of her daughter’s throat on a regular basis. The care activity itself required only about 5 minutes out of every hour. The responsibility to provide this care, however, made it virtually impossible for the mother to perform any activities outside the home, even shopping (Bittman, personal communication).

Most discussion of problems with care measurement focuses on the more mundane, though also significant problem of measuring secondary activities, those conducted simultaneously with primary activities. For instance, a mother might report that her primary activity is cooking dinner, but her secondary activity is talking with her children while she does so. As was observed in one of the first published cross-national comparisons of child care time, much child care takes the form of secondary activities, measurement of which is highly susceptible to differences in survey wording and administration (Stone, 1972). Duncan Ironmonger argues that primary activity measures may capture no more than about 25% of time devoted to children (Ironmonger, 2003, 2004).

The measurement of child care as a secondary activity seems most successful when, as in the Australian case, supervisory care or "looking after children" is included on an explicit activity list. National surveys are inconsistent on this issue, and not all include an explicit activity list. Yoon (2005) describes resulting problems with interpretation of Korean time use data. Budlender (2008b) and Charmes (2006:58) observe a number of difficulties with time use surveys in other developing countries. Budlender notes that questions on secondary and simultaneous activities in the Nicaraguan time use survey were so poorly answered that they were not included in official analysis (Budlender 2008b:6).

Both the U.S. and Canadian time use surveys have successfully added more stylized measures to time diary surveys, asking respondents specifically to consider during which activities they had children "in their care" (the U.S. wording) or "looking after children" (the Canadian wording).[1] While this is a promising approach, results seem sensitive to small differences in wording, limiting both international and longitudinal comparability (Folbre and Yoon, 2007; Allard et al., 2007). Yet another strategy entails analysis of time diary data regarding "who else was present" while an activity was being conducted (our later analysis of the

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