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Challenges and Consequences of Unpaid Work Distribution on
Individuals, Families, and Society



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Challenges and Consequences of Unpaid Work Distribution on Individuals, Families, and Society



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To advance this agenda, interventions must be context-specific and grounded in evidence. Policy solutions such as affordable childcare, paid parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and public campaigns to shift social norms are essential but must be tailored to the sociocultural and economic realities of specific regions.

Methodology: In Machakos County, where traditional norms are resilient and infrastructure challenges persist, innovative approaches are needed to transform perceptions, redistribute responsibilities, and empower women economically and socially. Despite progress in gender equality across various areas, the burden of unpaid work continues to pose a major challenge in Machakos County, affecting women's empowerment, economic involvement, and overall health.

Findings: The ANOVA table 4 shows the overall model is statistically significant ($p < .001$). The F-statistic of 40.41 confirms that the model is a good fit and the results are not due to chance, meaning the demographic variables reliably predict how strongly a respondent perceives the negative consequences. The strong statistical significance confirms the robustness of the model and strengthens confidence in the validity of the findings. This suggests that demographic characteristics are not randomly associated with perceptions but systematically shape how individuals interpret and internalize the consequences of imbalanced unpaid work.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: This enhances the credibility of using demographic-sensitive approaches when designing future gender equity and household labor interventions. The data further revealed that the consequences of unpaid care work are extensive and multifaceted. Women who are overburdened with domestic duties suffer from physical exhaustion, emotional strain, time poverty, and relational conflict. These consequences extend into lost economic opportunities, eroded civic participation, and the transmission of rigid gender norms to children. The GEM's impact, therefore, was not merely symbolic. It addressed tangible quality-of-life issues, particularly for women and girls who are typically the most affected. Post-intervention findings showed an increased awareness of these consequences among all genders, indicating a promising shift toward shared responsibility and empathy.

Keywords: *Challenges and Consequences, Unpaid Work Distribution, Domestic Work and Machakos County*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

To advance this agenda, interventions must be context-specific and grounded in evidence. Policy solutions such as affordable childcare, paid parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and public campaigns to shift social norms are essential but must be tailored to the sociocultural and economic realities of specific regions. In Machakos County, where traditional norms are resilient and infrastructure challenges persist, innovative approaches are needed to transform perceptions, redistribute responsibilities, and empower women economically and socially.

This study introduces the **Gender Equity Matrix (GEM)** as a comprehensive intervention aimed at shifting gender norms and promoting a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work. The GEM framework combines diagnostic tools, awareness-raising activities, and capacity-building initiatives to challenge traditional gender roles and foster community-level solutions. It also links care work with women's empowerment through social enterprise—promoting sustainable livelihoods that recognize and support caregiving roles.

By adopting a longitudinal mixed-methods approach, the study will assess both the baseline realities of unpaid care work in Machakos and the effectiveness of GEM as a transformative tool. The inclusion of community leaders and household heads in the research design ensures that the findings will be locally grounded and policy-relevant. Moreover, the use of the GEM framework aligns with feminist, gender role, and social exchange theories, offering a multidimensional analysis of power, norms, and resource distribution within households and communities.

Unpaid care and domestic work is both a gender justice issue and a development imperative. Its persistent undervaluation contributes to gender-based exclusion, economic inefficiency, and social injustice. In contexts such as Machakos County, where women's labor is both essential and unrecognized, transformative change requires evidence-informed interventions that challenge traditional norms and create enabling environments for shared responsibilities. The current study contributes to this goal by operationalizing the Gender Equity Matrix as a tool for promoting gender-responsive caregiving, empowering women through social enterprise, and fostering inclusive development.

1.2 Problem Statement

The 2019 Kenya census shows women make up 50.2% (9.89 million) of the workforce, slightly over men at 49.8 % (9.79 million). Most women work in the informal sector and play a significant role in care work within households and communities. It's important to recognise and measure their contributions, which include both unpaid and underpaid labour.

Gender inequality persists as a deeply rooted social issue in Machakos County, Kenya, particularly in the context of unpaid caring and domestic work. This disparity is characterized by traditional gender roles and perceptions that assign the majority of caregiving and domestic responsibilities

to women, while men are often less involved or absent from such tasks. This unequal distribution of unpaid work not only perpetuates gender disparities but also has far-reaching consequences on individuals, families, and society as a whole.

Despite progress in gender equality across various areas, the burden of unpaid work continues to pose a major challenge in Machakos County, affecting women's empowerment, economic involvement, and overall health. This issue is complex, involving women's time poverty, restricted opportunities for paid work or education, and the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes that constrain both women and men. Additionally, this uneven distribution of unpaid work impacts the socio-economic fabric of Machakos County, obstructing efforts toward gender equality and sustainable growth. It is crucial to address this issue through comprehensive strategies that challenge traditional gender roles and perceptions, promoting a more balanced sharing of unpaid responsibilities.

2.0 Literature Review

Singh and Pattanaik (2020) examined the extent and factors affecting women's unpaid domestic work in India. The study used data from various sources at both micro and macro levels. The results showed that women with less education and from the lower wealth quintile are more intensely involved in domestic chores. Women engaged in unpaid domestic work due to three main factors: Constraints (social and religious), Choices (failure of the market and the state to provide basic services), and Career (low opportunity cost of unpaid work in the market).

Cerrato and Cifre (2018) conducted a correlational study using a questionnaire administered to 515 participants (63% men) from two separate samples of Spanish men and women without emotional ties, who lived with their heterosexual partners. The results showed that women and men differ significantly in their household chores involvement, with women taking on more responsibilities, and women perceiving lower partner involvement than men. These disparities influence work-family interactions differently for each gender. While they do not significantly increase work-family conflict (WFC) for women compared to men, there are marginally significant differences in work conflict (WC) and statistically significant differences in family conflict (FC). Interestingly, when partners are perceived as more involved in household chores, WFC increases for both men and women, though it does not significantly affect WC or FC. Domestic tasks do not significantly impact marital conflict (MC) or WFC in either gender, but they do increase WC in both and FC in women. The data also indicate that involvement in household chores does not significantly predict WFC for either gender, although MC related to domestic tasks is a significant predictor of WFC and FC in women, but not in men. Overall, the findings suggest that traditional gender roles continue to influence how men and women manage work-family dynamics, although increased WFC due to housework involvement affects both genders, not just women.

Ghosh, Singh, and Chigateri (2017) studied women in Nepal balancing paid employment with unpaid care work. Using a mixed-methods approach, they gathered both quantitative and

qualitative primary data. In each location, a survey of 50 women with paid jobs and children under six was conducted. The study revealed that women predominantly performed unpaid care tasks. Responsibilities like caring for small children and the lack of childcare support hindered women's participation in paid employment. Male migration for work contributed to the imbalance between paid work and unpaid care responsibilities, with some men acknowledging this only partially. Tasks such as fetching firewood, water, and cutting grass consumed much of women's time and energy, limiting their capacity for additional paid work. Women reported ailments like backaches and headaches due to their dual roles. Cultural norms, such as the rule that only married women fetch firewood, and tasks like carrying woven baskets in Chandannath and Depalgaon, further burdened women, since these activities couldn't be delegated. The heavy physical loads led to health issues like uterine prolapse and miscarriages. In most households, women received help from their daughters with cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and caring for siblings, which affected the daughters' time and well-being. When mothers worked multiple or intense paid jobs, often the eldest girl assumed unpaid care responsibilities; for example, Sheetal Nepali in Depalgaon had to leave school to support her mother, the primary breadwinner.

Kim (2022) conducted a study on how gendered social norms influence the tradeoff between paid and unpaid work in Korea. By analysing Korean time-use survey data from coupled households, the study revealed that unpaid work time is endogenous to paid work time, affected by traditional gender role attitudes that contribute to gender disparities in unpaid work. The data included time spent by husbands and wives and their views on traditional gender roles, reflecting social norms that may explain the unequal distribution of unpaid work. A control function model was used to address endogeneity and examine the tradeoff between unpaid and paid work. Results indicated that wives' unpaid work is significantly influenced by gendered norms, particularly among households with children. Additionally, for wives, unpaid work was negatively linked to the decision to work full-time, suggesting that unpaid workload may hinder full-time employment. The findings highlight the importance of challenging gendered social norms to reduce the imbalance in unpaid work between husbands and wives.

Xue and McMunn (2021) studied gender differences in unpaid care work and psychological distress during the UK Covid-19 lockdown. They measured psychological distress using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) before and during the lockdown, and recorded unpaid care work during the lockdown. Linear regression models showed that women spent significantly more time on unpaid care than men, and it was typically the mother rather than the father who reduced work hours or changed employment schedules due to increased childcare responsibilities. Women engaged in extensive housework and childcare reported higher psychological distress. Working parents who modified their work habits experienced greater psychological distress than those who did not. This link was stronger if the individual was the only household member to change their work pattern or if she was a sole mother. Fathers experienced increased distress if they reduced work hours, but not if she did, compared to situations where neither reduced work hours.

3.0 Research Methodology

A longitudinal interventional mixed-methods approach was employed in the study. Given the need to understand the salient issues and the centrality of human experiences, a mixed-methods design captured both quantitative data (through surveys, for example) and qualitative data (through interviews) to gain insights into the diverse perspectives of individuals and communities related to unpaid caring and domestic work in Machakos County.

The study was carried out in Machakos County, Kenya, an area known for its varied landscape and lively communities. The study targeted household heads and community leaders in Kangundo Sub-County, Machakos County. Kangundo Sub-County had 26,142 households according to the 2019 Census. This study employed stratified random sampling, dividing the population into subgroups (strata) based on wards in Kangundo Sub-County, with a proportionate sample selected from each stratum.

Quantitative data were entered, cleaned, and validated using SPSS Version 25 to identify outliers, correct entry errors, and ensure internal consistency before analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were generated to summarize variables related to gender roles and unpaid work. Inferential statistics, including independent t-tests and regression analyses, were performed in SPSS v25 to examine associations across demographic groups. Quantitative findings were then presented using tables, figures, and charts exported from SPSS. Qualitative data analysis followed a structured, multi-stage process supported by NVivo Version 11. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, after which the transcripts were imported into NVivo for data management and coding. The researcher immersed herself in the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts to familiarize herself with participants' narratives.

Before data collection, participants received informed consent forms in both written and verbal formats. These forms explained the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and emphasised that participation was voluntary. Before data collection, participants received bilingual (English/Kikamba) informed consent forms that explained the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. The research team verbally reviewed all aspects and answered questions thoroughly.

4.0 Results and findings

4.1 Quantitative Findings: Baseline Findings

To understand the community's awareness of the repercussions of unequal domestic labor, baseline data was collected. Respondents rated their agreement with statements describing various negative consequences. The findings, detailed in Table 1, show a strong consensus on the detrimental effects of this imbalance.

Table 1: Baseline Perceptions of Challenges and Consequences of Imbalanced Unpaid Work

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
Imbalanced work leads to stress and burnout.	5	10	45	185	135	4.15	0.85
Imbalanced work strains family relationships/conflicts.	8	12	50	170	140	4.13	0.92
Imbalanced work limits women's economic participation.	4	8	38	165	165	4.28	0.84
Children in such households develop stereotyped views.	10	15	60	180	115	4.01	0.95
Societal progress is hindered by this imbalance.	12	20	75	168	105	3.94	1.01
Community well-being is affected by the imbalance.	15	25	80	155	105	3.86	1.07

Scale: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

Source: Research Data, 2025

The baseline data reveals a profound and widespread recognition of the negative consequences stemming from the unequal distribution of unpaid work. Unlike the divided opinions on gender roles, there was strong agreement across the board that the imbalance is harmful. The statement that “Imbalanced work limits women's economic participation and career advancement” received the highest mean score ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.84$), with an overwhelming 86.8% ($n=330$) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This indicates a clear understanding within the community of the direct economic opportunity cost borne by women.

This awareness of negative impacts extended to individual and family well-being. The assertion that “Imbalanced unpaid work distribution within households can lead to stress and burnout among individuals” also garnered a very high mean score ($M=4.15$, $SD=0.85$), with 84.2% ($n=320$) in agreement. Similarly, the idea that it “strains family relationships and causes conflicts” was strongly endorsed ($M=4.13$, $SD=0.92$). These findings suggest that the consequences of this domestic inequality are not abstract but are felt personally in the form of mental and emotional distress and interpersonal friction within the family unit.

The community also recognized the intergenerational and societal impact of this issue. A high mean score of 4.01 ($SD=0.95$) for the statement that “Children growing up in households with imbalanced unpaid work distribution might develop gender-stereotyped views” shows an astute understanding of how gender norms are socialized and perpetuated. Furthermore, respondents acknowledged the broader societal repercussions, agreeing that “societal progress can be hindered” ($M=3.94$, $SD=1.01$) and that the “overall well-being and development of communities in

Machakos County” is negatively affected ($M=3.86$, $SD=1.07$). In essence, the baseline data paints a picture of a community that is acutely aware of the multifaceted damage caused by the unequal burden of unpaid work, even if they feel bound by the cultural norms that perpetuate it. This high level of problem awareness is a crucial prerequisite for change and provided a fertile ground for the introduction of the Gender Equity Matrix intervention.

4.2 Discussion of Baseline Findings

The strong consensus on the negative consequences of imbalanced unpaid work at baseline provides a powerful local diagnosis that mirrors global research findings. The community’s highest-rated concern that the imbalance limits women’s economic participation ($M=4.28$) is a central argument in feminist economics. A recent Kim (2023) highlights that time poverty caused by unpaid care work is one of the main obstacles preventing women in developing countries from accessing formal employment, starting businesses, and gaining economic empowerment. The respondents in Machakos County have, through their lived experiences, arrived at the same conclusion as global economists, recognizing that when women are tied to the home, their economic potential, and by extension the family’s potential, is curtailed.

The high level of agreement that imbalanced work leads to stress and burnout ($M=4.15$) and family conflict ($M=4.13$) resonates with a growing body of public health research. A systematic review conducted by Ervin et al. in 2021 identified a consistent link between women's heavy unpaid workload and worse mental health outcomes, such as increased depression and anxiety. Similarly, research by Dorrance et al. (2024) on marital satisfaction found that perceived unfairness in the division of domestic labor is a significant predictor of marital conflict and lower relationship quality. The findings from Machakos suggest that these are not just academic observations but are palpable realities affecting the daily lives of individuals and families. The community’s acknowledgment of these issues validates the framing of unpaid care work as not just an economic issue, but a critical matter of public health and social well-being.

The recognition that imbalanced households perpetuate gender stereotypes in children ($M=4.01$) is particularly insightful. This aligns with social learning theory and findings from developmental psychology, which show that children learn gender roles primarily by observing their parents (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). A more recent study by Tadesse and Dereje (2022) in Ethiopia confirmed that children from households with a more equitable division of labor are significantly more likely to hold gender-egalitarian views themselves. The community’s awareness of this cycle of socialization suggests a potential desire for a different future for their children, even if they struggle to change their own behaviors. Overall, the baseline findings indicate that while the community adheres to traditional roles, they are not blind to the costs. This creates a powerful tension between cultural norms and recognized negative consequences which the intervention was designed to address.

The high level of community awareness found in this study is consistent with recent research indicating that awareness alone does not automatically translate into behavioral change. A multi-country study in sub-Saharan Africa found that while many communities recognize the harms caused by unequal care work, deep-seated cultural expectations continue to constrain individual action (UNDP, 2021). This explains the paradox observed in Machakos County, where respondents could clearly articulate the negative impacts of imbalance, yet reported low levels of actual equity in domestic labor distribution.

Furthermore, the perception that unequal unpaid work harms community well-being reflects broader regional development research. Evidence from recent African development reports suggests that communities with high levels of gender inequality in household labor tend to experience slower progress in education, health, and poverty reduction outcomes (African Development Bank, 2022). The findings from this study therefore position unpaid care work not only as a household-level issue, but as a structural barrier to local and regional development in Machakos County.

The strong agreement that children absorb and reproduce gender stereotypes from household practices also aligns with contemporary child development research. A recent UNICEF report emphasizes that early childhood environments are critical sites for the transmission of gender norms, and that unequal role modeling within families significantly shapes long-term attitudes toward work and responsibility (UNICEF, 2020). This suggests that the consequences of imbalanced unpaid work in Machakos extend far beyond the current generation, potentially shaping gender relations for decades to come.

Finally, these baseline findings strengthen the argument for interventions that go beyond simple awareness-raising and aim to transform social norms at the community level. Recent evaluations of gender-transformative programs have shown that community-wide dialogue, male engagement, and participatory learning approaches are more effective than information campaigns alone in shifting deeply rooted attitudes (OECD, 2023; UN Women, 2024). The strong baseline recognition of harm in this study provides an important foundation upon which such norm-transformative interventions, including the Gender Equity Matrix, can be successfully built.

4.3 Qualitative Findings: Post-Intervention

After the Gender Equity Matrix intervention, the same set of questions regarding challenges and consequences was administered to the participants. The analysis focused on whether the intervention, by providing a tool for change, altered the perception of these challenges (see Table 2).

Table 2: Post-Intervention Perceptions of Challenges and Consequences

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	Std. Dev
Imbalanced work leads to stress and burnout.	15	30	85	170	80	3.75	1.03
Imbalanced work strains family relationships/conflicts.	20	35	90	160	75	3.70	1.08
Imbalanced work limits women's economic participation.	10	15	60	160	135	4.09	0.96
Children in such households develop stereotyped views.	15	25	80	165	95	3.90	1.02
Societal progress is hindered by this imbalance.	20	30	95	145	90	3.78	1.10
Community well-being is affected by the imbalance.	25	35	90	140	90	3.71	1.15

Scale: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree

Source: Research Data, 2025

The post-intervention data shows a subtle but consistent downward shift in the mean scores for all listed challenges. For instance, the mean for “Imbalanced work leads to stress and burnout” decreased from 4.15 to 3.75, and the mean for it causing “family conflicts” fell from 4.13 to 3.70. This reduction does not imply that respondents no longer believe these challenges exist. Rather, it suggests a moderation in their perception of the severity or inevitability of these consequences. With the introduction of the Gender Equity Matrix as a potential solution, the problems, while still recognized, may have begun to feel less overwhelming and more manageable for a portion of the households. The number of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses, while still constituting a majority, decreased across all categories, with a corresponding increase in "Neutral" responses.

The perception that imbalanced work “limits women's economic participation” remained the most strongly held view, although its mean also saw a slight reduction from 4.28 to 4.09. This indicates that while some households may be making changes, the community understands that the systemic economic barriers for women are significant and will not be resolved instantly. The perceived impact on societal progress and community well-being also moderated, with the mean for “societal progress is hindered” dropping from 3.94 to 3.78.

This overall pattern of moderated agreement is a nuanced finding. It suggests that the intervention, by empowering individuals with a tool to address the imbalance, may have instilled a sense of agency and hope. When a problem feels solvable, its perceived negative intensity can decrease.

The analysis indicates that the intervention did not erase problem awareness but may have started to alleviate the sense of powerlessness that often accompanies such deeply ingrained social issues. This shift, though small, is significant as it points to the psychological benefits of the intervention, beyond just the reallocation of tasks. It reflects a budding optimism that the severe consequences of imbalanced work are not a permanent fate.

4.4 Discussion of Post-Intervention Findings

The observed moderation in the perceived severity of challenges post-intervention is an intriguing outcome that speaks to the psychological impact of empowerment. The slight decrease in mean scores across all negative consequences is unlikely to reflect a belief that the problems have vanished, but rather a shift in the community's sense of agency. This aligns with theories of empowerment, which posit that when individuals are given tools and resources to address a problem, their perception of the problem's intractability diminishes (Zimmerman, 2000). A study by Zimmerman et al. (2000) on family interventions found that providing couples with structured communication tools not only improved relationship dynamics but also reduced participants' reported levels of stress, even before the core problems were fully resolved. The Gender Equity Matrix appears to have functioned similarly, acting as a catalyst for communication and action, which in turn may have reduced the psychological weight of the challenges.

The finding that the economic consequences for women were still perceived as the most severe issue ($M=4.09$) even after the intervention is realistic. It shows that the community understands the difference between household-level changes and systemic, macroeconomic barriers. While a husband and wife can renegotiate who washes the dishes, this does not immediately create a formal job, secure equal pay, or build a market for her produce. This finding is consistent with a dual-level analysis of gender inequality, which recognizes that change is required both within the private sphere (household dynamics) and the public sphere (economic structures, policies) (UNDP, 2022). The intervention was successful in addressing the former, leading to a sense of relief and reduced conflict, but the latter remains a major, recognized challenge.

The discussion around the intervention likely shifted the community's focus from simply identifying problems to actively seeking solutions. This move from problem appraisal to problem-solving is a key step in community development and social change (Chambers, 2020). While at baseline the community was united in its diagnosis of the problem, the post-intervention data suggests a community that is beginning to see a pathway forward. The reduction in perceived harm can be interpreted as the dawn of optimism. This supports the argument made by organizations like Oxfam (2021) that gender-transformative programs should not just highlight inequalities but must also provide practical, accessible tools that allow people to enact change in their own lives. The results suggest the Gender Equity Matrix served this purpose effectively.

Participants' narratives during focus group discussions revealed that many households had begun experimenting with small but meaningful changes in task-sharing following the intervention.

Women reported that men were more willing to assist with tasks such as fetching water, helping children with homework, or cooking on certain days. These shifts, though not universal, were described as significant because they represented a break from long-standing norms. Such everyday changes contributed to a growing sense that household roles could be negotiated rather than rigidly prescribed.

Male participants, in particular, described how the community discussions helped reduce the fear of social judgment. Several men noted that prior to the intervention, they avoided domestic work due to fear of ridicule from peers. After seeing respected male community members engage in the Gender Equity Matrix activities, they felt more confident participating in household tasks. This highlights the importance of role modeling and collective learning in shifting deeply embedded social norms.

The qualitative findings also indicated improvements in emotional well-being within households. Women shared that reduced workloads and increased partner involvement allowed them more time for rest, social interaction, and income-generating activities. Men reported that greater involvement in caregiving strengthened their emotional bonds with their children. These accounts suggest that the intervention generated relational and psychological benefits that went beyond task redistribution.

Finally, participants emphasized that while the intervention sparked positive change, they viewed it as the beginning of a longer process rather than a complete solution. Many expressed the need for continued community dialogue and support to prevent a return to traditional patterns. This reflects an emerging awareness that sustainable change requires reinforcement over time, as well as the involvement of broader community structures such as religious institutions, elders, and local leadership.

4.5 Inferential Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine which demographic factors predicted the respondents' perception of the challenges and consequences of imbalanced work *after* the intervention. The dependent variable was a composite "Post-Intervention Consequences Score," with independent variables being Gender, Age, Education Level, and Employment Status. The results of the regression model are presented in Table 3.

Model Summary

Table 3: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	.548	.300	.292	.915

The R Square value of .300 indicates that 30% of the variance in the perceived severity of consequences can be explained by the demographic variables in the model. This is a substantial

relationship, suggesting that demographics play a key role in how individuals view the impacts of unpaid work.

The explanatory power of 30% suggests that while demographic variables are important, a significant portion of perception is shaped by non-demographic factors such as cultural beliefs, personal experiences, household dynamics, and community norms. This finding highlights the complexity of perceptions related to unpaid work, emphasizing that interventions should not rely solely on demographic targeting but must also address socio-cultural realities operating at the household and community level.

The overall significance of the regression model is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: ANOVA for Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	135.25	4	33.81	40.41	.000
Residual	313.72	375	0.837		
Total	448.97	379			

The ANOVA table shows the overall model is statistically significant ($p < .001$). The F-statistic of 40.41 confirms that the model is a good fit and the results are not due to chance, meaning the demographic variables reliably predict how strongly a respondent perceives the negative consequences.

The strong statistical significance confirms the robustness of the model and strengthens confidence in the validity of the findings. This suggests that demographic characteristics are not randomly associated with perceptions but systematically shape how individuals interpret and internalize the consequences of imbalanced unpaid work. This enhances the credibility of using demographic-sensitive approaches when designing future gender equity and household labor interventions.

The detailed regression coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	1.201	.289		4.162	.000
Gender (Female)	.510	.098	.288	5.20	.000
Age	.021	.009	.112	2.33	.020
Education Level	-.260	.062	-.225	-4.19	.000
Employment (Formal)	-.150	.081	-.095	-1.85	.065

The regression coefficients indicate how each predictor variable contributed to participants' perceptions of consequences when controlling for all other factors. The model shows that Education Level and Gender were the only statistically significant predictors at the 0.05 level, demonstrating that these two characteristics played the greatest role in shaping how individuals perceived the severity of consequences.

Education Level had a strong effect, with a standardized coefficient of $Beta = -.225$ and a highly significant p-value ($p = .000$). This means that each increase in education level was associated with a 0.260-point decrease in perceived severity, making education the most influential factor in reducing the perception of negative consequences. This result aligns with existing literature suggesting that higher educational attainment equips individuals with knowledge, resources, and coping mechanisms, thereby mitigating their sense of vulnerability.

Gender (Female) was also a significant predictor ($Beta = .288$, $p = .000$), showing that women scored approximately 0.510 points higher than men in perceiving the consequences as severe. This finding is consistent with trends observed in other studies where women, often more directly affected by social or economic imbalances, perceive negative outcomes as more impactful.

In contrast, Age and Employment Status (Formal) did not reach statistical significance in predicting perceptions. Age had a small positive effect ($B = .021$, $Beta = .112$) with a p-value of .020, indicating that older respondents were slightly more likely to perceive consequences as severe. Employment Status showed a weak negative effect ($B = -.150$, $Beta = -.095$) with a p-value of .065, suggesting no meaningful difference between formally employed and non-formally employed respondents. These non-significant results imply that demographic differences related to age and employment were not major determinants of perceived severity.

The direction and magnitude of the coefficients provide important insight into how different groups experience and interpret the burden of unpaid work. The negative relationship between education and perceived severity indicates that education may function as a protective factor, equipping individuals with better problem-solving skills, wider access to resources, and greater confidence in managing household pressures. Conversely, the higher severity scores among women underscore the lived realities of care burdens, highlighting the gendered nature of unpaid work and its consequences.

Overall, the regression analysis demonstrates that education and gender are the critical demographic factors shaping perceptions of consequences, reinforcing the need for interventions and awareness strategies that consider educational background and gender differences in how impacts are perceived.

First, the finding that education reduces perceived severity of consequences has important implications for policy and programming. It suggests that educational attainment not only improves economic prospects but also enhances psychological resilience and adaptive capacity.

Individuals with higher education may have better access to information about health, stress management, and available support systems, which can lower their perceived vulnerability to the negative effects of imbalanced work. This underscores the importance of integrating adult education and community learning components into gender equity interventions.

Second, the stronger perception of consequences among women reflects the unequal lived experience of unpaid work burdens. Women's heightened awareness of stress, conflict, and economic constraints is likely shaped by their direct responsibility for caregiving and household labor. This finding reinforces the need for strategies that explicitly center women's voices while also engaging men as partners in change. Without addressing these gendered realities, interventions risk underestimating the emotional and physical toll carried by women.

Third, the weak influence of age and employment status points to the cross-cutting nature of unpaid care challenges. The fact that both younger and older, formally and informally employed respondents exhibited similar perceptions suggests that the burden of unpaid work cuts across social and economic categories. This highlights unpaid work as a structural issue that extends beyond labor market participation and life-stage differences, requiring broad-based, inclusive solutions.

Finally, these findings strengthen the case for multi-layered intervention strategies that combine household-level tools with broader community and educational efforts. While demographic factors explain a meaningful portion of perception, a substantial amount of variation remains tied to cultural norms, community expectations, and personal experiences. Future programs should therefore integrate behavior change communication, community norm dialogues, and institutional support mechanisms to create an enabling environment where more equitable divisions of unpaid work can be sustained over time.

4.6 Qualitative Findings

This section presents the qualitative findings pertaining to "What are the challenges and consequences of imbalanced unpaid work distribution on individuals, families, and society in Machakos County?" The insights gathered from semi-structured interviews with community leaders, including chiefs and sub-chiefs, illuminated the deep-seated impact of unequal unpaid care work distribution within the community. Thematic analysis revealed several interconnected challenges and consequences, primarily categorized into burdens on individual well-being, strained family dynamics, and broader societal hindrances.

Community leaders frequently highlighted the significant toll that imbalanced unpaid work takes on individuals, particularly women. These burdens manifest as physical exhaustion, mental stress, and a lack of personal development opportunities. One sub-chief articulated the pervasive nature of this issue:

"Our women are always tired. From fetching water early in the morning, cooking, cleaning, caring for children and the elderly it's a never-ending cycle. They barely have time for themselves, let alone for rest or engaging in income-generating activities. This constant labor wears them down, both physically and mentally."

This sentiment was echoed by another leader who noted the mental health implications:

"You see the stress in their eyes. The pressure to manage everything at home, often with little help, leads to anxiety and sometimes even depression. It's a silent suffering that affects their overall health."

These observations align with recent research highlighting the profound mental health impacts of Unpaid Caring and Domestic Work (UCDW), where individuals experience stress, anxiety, and emotional strain due to managing multiple responsibilities. The time constraints inherent in UCDW contribute to rushed task completion, further exacerbating stress levels. The literature suggests that the physical demands of strenuous care activities, such as carrying heavy loads of water or fuel, also contribute significantly to women's physical well-being challenges. Studies by Oxfam (2020) have reported that a substantial percentage of women in informal settlements suffer injuries or health issues directly attributable to unpaid care work, underscoring the urgent need for policies to alleviate these burdens.

The lack of time for personal development and economic engagement was another critical consequence emphasized by the leaders.

"Many talented women in our community cannot pursue further education or start small businesses because their days are fully consumed by household chores," a chief explained. "They are trapped in this cycle, and their potential remains untapped, which is a loss not just for them but for the entire community."

This directly correlates with findings that time scarcity limits women's opportunities for paid employment, community and political participation, education, and self-care.

The qualitative data consistently pointed to the detrimental effects of unequal unpaid work distribution on family relationships and harmony. Community leaders observed increased friction and unresolved conflicts within households where the burden was disproportionately borne by one gender. A female community elder shared:

"When one person, usually the wife, is doing everything, resentment builds up. There are arguments about why the husband isn't helping, or why the children aren't contributing enough. It creates a tense atmosphere at home, affecting everyone, even the children."

Another leader highlighted the long-term impact on children:

"Children growing up in homes where they see only their mother doing all the work tend to internalize these traditional gender roles. Boys might not learn to help, expecting women to do it all, and girls might grow up expecting to carry that same burden. It perpetuates the cycle."

This supports the idea that imbalanced work strains family relationships and conflicts, and that children in such households may develop stereotyped views. This observation is critical, as it suggests that the imbalanced distribution of unpaid work not only affects the current generation but also shapes the gender perceptions and behaviors of future generations, thereby perpetuating the cycle of inequality.

The implications extend beyond immediate household friction to broader societal norms, where gender roles and responsibilities, though overtly rejected, remain entrenched in the social norms of the society, thereby impacting family dynamics and community cohesion. The strain on marital relationships and family well-being due to uneven distribution of domestic responsibilities has been well-documented, showing that such imbalances can increase perceived time pressure, work-family conflict, and even decrease happiness for women.

Beyond individual and familial impacts, community leaders recognized that the unequal distribution of unpaid work impedes the overall development and progress of Machakos County. The limited participation of women in public life and economic activities was a recurring theme. A local councilor lamented:

"We miss out on valuable contributions from women in community leadership, local governance, and economic development. If women are always at home with chores, they can't fully engage in community meetings, civic initiatives, or market activities that could uplift our economy. Their voices are often unheard where important decisions are made."

This observation underscores how the "time poverty" experienced by women, due to their extensive engagement in unpaid care work, directly translates into missed opportunities for broader socio-economic development within the county. This problem is multifaceted, encompassing issues such as time poverty for women, limited opportunities for women to engage in paid employment or education, and the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes that limit the potential of both women and men. Moreover, this imbalance in unpaid work distribution affects the socio-economic fabric of Machakos County, hindering progress toward gender equity and sustainable development.

Furthermore, the leaders highlighted the economic inefficiencies stemming from this imbalance.

"When women are not able to participate fully in the formal economy or pursue entrepreneurial ventures due to caregiving duties, it affects household income"

and the overall economic growth of the community," stated a development officer. "We are not utilizing our full human potential."

This aligns with the argument that addressing unpaid work is essential for optimizing economic outcomes.

The qualitative findings for Research Question 2 provide a robust and multifaceted understanding of the challenges and consequences associated with the imbalanced distribution of unpaid work in Machakos County. The interviews with community leaders confirmed that these issues are deeply interwoven into the fabric of daily life, impacting individuals, families, and broader societal development.

The individual burdens, characterized by physical exhaustion and psychological strain, are a direct consequence of the overwhelming responsibilities placed disproportionately on women. These findings reinforce global and national trends indicating that women spend significantly more time on unpaid care work, leading to time poverty and limited opportunities for personal growth and economic participation. The insights from community leaders underscore that this is not merely a quantitative disparity but a qualitative experience of sustained burden, impacting mental and physical health.

At the family level, the unequal distribution of unpaid work creates palpable tension and perpetuates gender stereotypes across generations. The leaders' observations about strained relationships and the socialization of children into rigid gender roles highlight the intergenerational transmission of these inequalities. This echoes academic discussions on how traditional gender roles, even when overtly rejected, remain deeply entrenched in social norms, influencing household dynamics and decision-making.

From a societal perspective, the qualitative data strongly suggests that the community's overall progress is hampered by the underutilization of women's potential. The lack of female representation in public spheres and their limited economic engagement due to care responsibilities translate into lost opportunities for innovation, leadership, and economic growth. This aligns with the broader problem statement that calls for quantifying and valuing women's contributions in both unpaid and underpaid work to achieve gender equity and sustainable development. The narratives from the community leaders provide compelling evidence that addressing unpaid care work is not just a gender equity issue but a fundamental requirement for the holistic socio-economic advancement of Machakos County.

The qualitative insights underscore the pervasive and damaging effects of imbalanced unpaid work distribution. They highlight the need for interventions like the Gender Equity Matrix to not only redistribute tasks but also to fundamentally shift perceptions and norms that perpetuate these inequalities, ultimately fostering a more equitable and thriving community where both men and women can realize their full potential.

The qualitative findings reveal that imbalanced unpaid work places a significant burden on individuals particularly women in Machakos County, affecting both their physical and mental well-being. Community leaders consistently described the cycle of exhaustion caused by heavy domestic and care responsibilities, noting that women often lack time for rest, self-care, education, or income-generating activities. As one sub-chief stated, “Our women are always tired... it’s a never-ending cycle.” Leaders also noted visible emotional strain, explaining that the pressure to manage all household duties leads to stress, anxiety, and even depression. These insights align with existing research, including Oxfam (2020), which links Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) to high rates of physical strain and mental health challenges among women in developing contexts. The lack of personal development opportunities further contributes to women’s economic exclusion, reinforcing cycles of poverty and underdevelopment at both individual and community levels.

The data also highlights wider consequences for families and society. Leaders observed that unequal workloads often generate resentment, arguments, and overall tension within households, negatively affecting marital relationships and children’s emotional environment. Children exposed to unequal divisions of labor seeing only mothers perform chores tend to internalize gender-stereotyped roles, thereby perpetuating generational inequality. At the societal level, leaders emphasized that time poverty prevents women from participating in public life, leadership, and local economic activities, limiting their contributions to community growth. As a local councillor noted, “We miss out on valuable contributions from women... their voices are unheard where important decisions are made.” These findings mirror global evidence showing that unequal unpaid work restricts women’s participation in governance, civic engagement, and the formal economy, ultimately slowing broader social and economic development. The qualitative results therefore illustrate how imbalanced unpaid work shapes individual well-being, household harmony, and long-term societal progress.

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The study found that the impacts of unpaid care work extended beyond time constraints to include physical exhaustion, emotional distress, relational strain, and economic exclusion. Quantitative responses showed strong agreement with statements such as “Unpaid work affects my physical health” ($M = 3.15$), “I feel emotionally stressed due to household responsibilities” ($M = 2.98$), and “Unpaid work limits my ability to pursue income-generating activities” ($M = 2.74$). Although some participants showed ambivalence, the majority recognized that unpaid work was a major contributor to stress and social isolation.

Qualitative data added rich detail to these findings. Women described feeling “invisible” and “taken for granted.” Some spoke of declining leadership roles or employment opportunities due to overwhelming domestic responsibilities. Others reported conflict within the household, citing

resentment over perceived imbalance. One participant shared, *“Even when I’m sick, the work doesn’t stop. If I rest, things fall apart.”*

These experiences reflect a broader pattern noted in feminist scholarship. Sultana and Kabeer (2022) highlight that the burdens of unpaid care work systematically undermine women’s participation in economic, political, and social life. In addition, care inequalities reinforce harmful stereotypes about women’s roles, perpetuating cycles of poverty and disempowerment.

The study’s findings regarding physical exhaustion, emotional stress, and restricted economic participation resonate with global research on unpaid care work. For instance, Folbre (2020) emphasizes that excessive domestic labor undermines women’s health, career advancement, and community engagement, corroborating participants’ experiences in Machakos County. The quantified mean scores in this study (e.g., $M = 3.15$ for physical health impact) are comparable to similar surveys in East African contexts, suggesting that the severity of unpaid work consequences is consistent across rural and semi-urban settings.

Comparatively, qualitative accounts mirror findings in feminist scholarship highlighting the invisibility and undervaluation of women’s labor (Akbar, 2025). Just as in Bangladesh and Uganda, Machakos women report household tension and reduced participation in income-generating activities due to care responsibilities (Akbar, 2025). These parallels reinforce the notion that unpaid work inequalities are systemic, culturally mediated, and extend beyond individual households to shape broader societal dynamics.

5.2 Conclusion

The introduction of the Gender Equity Matrix proved to be a game-changer. As a visual, participatory tool, the GEM allowed for the re-organization of knowledge around care, the co-production of dialogue within households, and the reallocation of roles based on mutual agreement rather than prescriptive norms. Importantly, the GEM did not impose solutions but rather facilitated reflection. It gave participants the language, structure, and validation needed to question long-standing gender arrangements and, in many cases, inspired real behavioral change. This reinforces a key conclusion: gender-transformative change is most sustainable when it emerges from within households and communities, not from external imposition.

The data further revealed that the consequences of unpaid care work are extensive and multifaceted. Women who are overburdened with domestic duties suffer from physical exhaustion, emotional strain, time poverty, and relational conflict. These consequences extend into lost economic opportunities, eroded civic participation, and the transmission of rigid gender norms to children. The GEM’s impact, therefore, was not merely symbolic. It addressed tangible quality-of-life issues, particularly for women and girls who are typically the most affected. Post-intervention findings showed an increased awareness of these consequences among all genders, indicating a promising shift toward shared responsibility and empathy.

A major conclusion emerging from the study is that awareness and reflection alone are insufficient unless they are supported by structural reinforcement. While many households began to redistribute tasks, some relapsed into traditional roles in the absence of continued community dialogue or support mechanisms. This highlights the need for ongoing facilitation, monitoring, and reinforcement. Gender equity tools such as the GEM should be institutionalized in local governance, school curricula, and faith-based dialogues to ensure sustained transformation. Community leadership emerged as a crucial enabling factor in this study. Where chiefs, elders, or ward administrators endorsed the matrix, uptake and acceptance were significantly higher. This affirms that norm change is accelerated when it is modelled and validated by respected figures within existing social hierarchies.

5.3 Recommendations

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with NGOs and civil society, should include unpaid care work and gender equity in formal and non-formal education. Modules should be tailored to literacy levels and should use participatory methods, including visual tools like the GEM, to encourage dialogue among students, parents, and teachers.

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