

Unpaid Care Work: What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

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Unpaid care work is essential to the well-being of families, communities, and the economy. It includes childcare, eldercare, household labor, emotional labor, and the responsibilities of managing family life. In Utah, where family and caregiving are deeply valued, many women devote significant time and energy to these roles. While caregiving can be meaningful, fulfilling, and intentionally chosen, research shows that women continue to perform a large share of unpaid care work, which can affect economic opportunities, personal well-being, and efforts to balance home, work, and community commitments. Understanding the value, benefits, and challenges of unpaid care work is an important step toward strengthening support systems and reducing barriers for Utah women and families.

TIME DEMANDS

Women in Utah spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men. Utah women average 5.55 hours of unpaid work per day, compared to 3.22 hours for Utah men, a gap that exceeds the national difference between women (4.92 hours) and men (3.79 hours). Although men spend more time in paid employment, women perform more total work hours when unpaid labor is included. This disparity highlights the extent to which caregiving and household responsibilities continue to depend on women's labor and contributions.

CHILDCARE

Childcare remains one of the most significant forms of unpaid labor in Utah, a state characterized by large household sizes and high fertility rates. Utah women spend an average of 1.9 hours per day providing childcare, compared to 1.29 hours for men. Nationally, 23.7% of women report caring for household children on an average day, compared to 15% of men. While many women intentionally prioritize caregiving, childcare responsibilities can also influence employment decisions, career opportunities, and work-life balance.

WHY THIS MATTERS

"Unpaid work, including childcare, eldercare, housework, and other tasks, is vitally important to the creation of strong families, communities, and nations; in fact, such domestic work has been called 'the work that makes all other work possible.' Researchers and thought leaders worldwide are urging individuals and societies to recognize that unpaid work is indeed work and to value it accordingly."

Dr. Susan R. Madsen, UWLP Founding Director

ELDERCARE

Women are also more likely than men to provide care for aging family members. In Utah, 61.4% of caregivers are women. Nearly half of all caregivers work full-time while also managing caregiving responsibilities, and 23% spend more than 20 hours per week providing care. Additionally, 97% of caregiving in Utah is unpaid. As Utah's population ages, eldercare responsibilities will likely place increasing demands on women's time, energy, and resources.

UNPAID CARE WORK:

- falls primarily on women.
- extends beyond caregiving.
- impacts health and well-being.
- deserves greater recognition.

HOUSEHOLD EQUITY

Household labor represents another significant component of unpaid care work. In Utah, women spend an average of 1.62 hours per day on housework compared to 1.17 hours for men. Approximately half of Utah women perform housework every day, while only 15.7% of Utah men do. Although this gap has narrowed somewhat in recent years, women continue to spend more time on routine household responsibilities that help families and households function effectively.

Research also suggests that women and men often view the distribution of unpaid labor differently. In a statewide survey, 41.1% of women agreed that domestic labor was shared equitably within their homes, while 53.7% agreed that caregiving was shared equitably. Men were more likely than women to report that domestic labor and caregiving responsibilities were shared fairly. These findings suggest that experiences and perceptions of unpaid work can vary within households, and highlight opportunities for more conversations about expectations, responsibilities, and support.



INVISIBLE LOAD

Unpaid care work includes more than childcare, eldercare, and housework. It also encompasses the mental and emotional labor of managing family life, including planning, scheduling, organizing, anticipating needs, and coordinating responsibilities. Women often carry much of this invisible workload, even when household tasks are more evenly shared. Carrying a larger share of the cognitive and emotional load can leave women with less time and energy for personal well-being, education, career development, and community engagement.

LASTING IMPACTS

The effects of unpaid care work extend beyond the home. Women are five to eight times more likely than men to have their employment affected by unpaid care responsibilities and may reduce work hours, decline promotions, or leave the workforce. Heavy caregiving responsibilities are also associated with increased stress, depression, emotional exhaustion, and social isolation. Greater awareness of these impacts can help strengthen support for Utah caregivers and families.

BUILDING AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

Valuing unpaid care work benefits families and communities. Although caregiving is often described as “invisible” work, it plays a critical role in supporting children, older adults, households, and communities across Utah. Increasing public awareness of the contributions and value of unpaid care work can help ensure that caregivers are recognized and supported.

Stronger support systems can help reduce the challenges of unpaid care work. Expanding access to affordable and flexible childcare can help families better navigate caregiving responsibilities. Caregiver support networks, workplace flexibility, and efforts to promote work-family balance for both women and men can help strengthen family well-being and economic stability.

More equitable caregiving supports opportunity and well-being. When caregiving responsibilities are shared in ways that work for families, women are better positioned to pursue personal, educational, professional, and community goals. Encouraging open conversations about household responsibilities and challenging limiting assumptions about gender roles can strengthen relationships within the home. Greater awareness of the realities, benefits, and challenges of unpaid care work is a key step toward creating positive change for Utah women and families.

SUPPORT UNPAID CAREGIVERS IN UTAH

You can help support unpaid caregivers by recognizing the value of their contributions, sharing caregiving responsibilities when possible, and fostering open conversations about the challenges and benefits of unpaid care work. See below for calls to action and resources that can help strengthen support for caregivers and create positive outcomes for Utah women, families, and communities.

Data Sources: [UWLP Snapshot No. 54 \(2024\)](#), [UWLP White Paper No. 24 \(2026\)](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More:** Explore resources in the UWLP Home & Family [Resource Kit](#).
- **Review:** Goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Home & Family Spoke [webpage](#).
- **Get Involved:** Connect to grassroots movement happening within [A Bolder Way Forward](#).
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional [Calls to Action](#) for groups, organizations and communities.



Learn and share information about balanced domestic labor, care work, and emotional work. Resources on [this page](#) can be shared with family, friends, co-workers, religious leaders, and on social media.



Look for opportunities to support caregivers in your family and community. Offer practical help, stay connected, and regularly check in with those providing ongoing care.



Encourage open conversations about caregiving, work-family balance, and shared household labor to promote healthy expectations and supportive social norms.

Learn more at www.utwomen.org

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