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The Role of Emotional Labour in Reinforcing Gender Roles in Care Work

ANUPRIYA KUMARI¹ AND RIDHANSHU SINGH²

ABSTRACT

Emotional labour, first conceptualized by Arlie Hochschild, refers to the process of managing emotions to align with role expectations. In the realm of unpaid and care work, emotional labour is a critical yet frequently overlooked aspect of caregiving. This study investigates how emotional labour reinforces traditional gender roles, perpetuating systemic inequalities within patriarchal structures. By examining the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of emotional labour, the paper sheds light on its role in sustaining gendered expectations and the marginalization of care work. Using feminist theories and intersectional approaches, it argues for the urgent recognition and redistribution of care responsibilities. The study also emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy interventions to address the disproportionate burden of care work placed on women and to challenge the structural inequities inherent in current caregiving norms.

Keywords: *Emotional labour, Care work, Gender roles, Gendered expectations, Systemic inequities.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Care work is an essential yet undervalued component of societal functioning, encompassing a broad range of activities that include both paid and unpaid tasks aimed at sustaining the well-being of individuals and communities. It involves responsibilities such as child-rearing, elder care, and the provision of emotional support, which are vital to the continuity of families and societies. The term "care work" encompasses both tangible aspects, such as physical caregiving, and intangible aspects, such as providing emotional comfort and maintaining relational harmony. Despite its critical importance, care work is often dismissed as "natural" or instinctive, particularly when performed by women, rendering it invisible in economic and policy discussions.

Historically, societal norms have framed caregiving as a predominantly female responsibility, rooted in gendered expectations and reinforced through cultural, economic, and political

¹ Author is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, India.

² Author is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, India.

institutions. This framing contributes to the systemic undervaluation of care work, relegating it to the private sphere and excluding it from mainstream metrics of productivity. In particular, emotional labour—defined by Arlie Hochschild as the management of emotions to create a desired emotional state in others—is a central yet overlooked element of caregiving. Emotional labour encompasses activities such as providing empathy, resolving conflicts, and maintaining social cohesion, which, while intangible, are integral to the functioning of families and communities.

This paper critically examines the mechanisms through which emotional labour reinforces traditional gender roles. By exploring its socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions, the analysis highlights how deeply ingrained gender norms perpetuate systemic inequities in care work. Furthermore, it considers the intersectional impacts of emotional labour, acknowledging the diverse experiences of women shaped by race, class, caste, and other factors. The paper argues for the need to recognize and redistribute the burden of emotional labour to achieve gender equity and social justice.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GENDERED CARE WORK

Arlie Hochschild's foundational work on emotional labour defines it as the process of managing one's emotions to elicit a specific emotional response in others. Initially framed within the context of service-oriented professions, emotional labour has broader applicability, especially within the realm of unpaid care work. Caregiving, which encompasses physical, emotional, and psychological support, relies heavily on emotional labour to sustain relationships and nurture well-being. From providing empathy and resolving conflicts to fostering an emotionally stable environment, emotional labour constitutes an integral yet undervalued component of care work. However, its significance often goes unnoticed due to entrenched societal norms and its inherent intangibility.

In unpaid caregiving roles, emotional labour extends beyond individual interactions to encompass systemic dimensions that reflect and reinforce societal hierarchies. Caregivers, often women, are expected to embody traits like patience, empathy, and emotional resilience, with little acknowledgment of the skills and energy required to fulfill these demands. Unlike tangible aspects of labour, such as physical caregiving, emotional labour remains largely unrecognized in traditional economic analyses. This invisibility is perpetuated by cultural narratives that frame caregiving as an innate quality of women rather than a learned and complex skill set. Consequently, the contributions of emotional labour are marginalized, perpetuating gender-based disparities in the valuation of work.

Key Characteristics of Emotional Labour

1. **Intangibility:** Emotional labour primarily involves managing intangible elements such as emotions, moods, and relational dynamics. This characteristic makes it difficult to quantify or measure within existing economic and social frameworks, contributing to its exclusion from productivity metrics and compensation systems. For example, while the emotional support provided by caregivers is essential for fostering well-being, it is often dismissed as a “natural” extension of caregiving rather than recognized as a form of labour requiring effort and expertise.
2. **Gendered Expectations:** The assumption that women are naturally more empathetic and suited to caregiving roles reinforces the gendered division of labour. These stereotypes not only place a disproportionate burden of emotional labour on women but also perpetuate harmful norms that constrain women’s opportunities in professional and public spheres. By normalizing these expectations, societal structures continue to undervalue and exploit the emotional contributions of women, both in unpaid domestic work and in service-oriented professions.
3. **Invisibility:** One of the most critical features of emotional labour is its invisibility in economic and social systems. Its exclusion from metrics like GDP and its lack of formal recognition reflect broader systemic biases against work traditionally performed by women. This invisibility perpetuates the devaluation of emotional labour, making it easier for societal and institutional structures to ignore its importance and the toll it takes on caregivers.

By critically examining these characteristics, it becomes evident that emotional labour is not merely a supportive aspect of caregiving but a structural tool that sustains and reinforces patriarchal norms. It perpetuates inequities by burdening women with unacknowledged responsibilities, further hindering progress toward gender equality. Recognizing and addressing the complexities of emotional labour is essential to reshaping societal perceptions of care work and challenging the systemic devaluation of women’s contributions.

The association of women with caregiving roles has roots that extend deep into human history, shaped by societal structures and cultural norms. In pre-industrial agrarian societies, caregiving responsibilities such as child-rearing, elder care, and emotional support were integral to communal survival. These tasks were often distributed across families and communities, reflecting a collective approach to caregiving rather than one exclusively burdening women. However, even within these shared frameworks, caregiving began to be seen as a natural

extension of women's roles due to their proximity to household responsibilities and childbearing. This early relegation of caregiving to women, though not yet rigidly defined, laid the foundation for its later institutionalization as an unpaid and undervalued aspect of labour.

The industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries catalyzed a profound transformation in the division of labour, entrenching gendered norms in unprecedented ways. As economies shifted from agrarian to industrial modes of production, the separation between the public and private spheres became pronounced. Men, positioned as breadwinners, entered the public domain of factory work and wage-earning, while women were confined to the domestic sphere, tasked with reproduction and caregiving. This separation was not incidental; it was deliberately reinforced by patriarchal ideologies that framed caregiving as a natural, unskilled extension of women's roles. For example, the "cult of domesticity" in 19th-century Europe and North America glorified women's roles as homemakers and moral guardians, perpetuating the idea that their primary duty lay within the household (Welter, 1966).

The rise of capitalism during industrialization further marginalized care work by emphasizing productivity, profit, and economic growth. Activities outside the formal market, such as caregiving, were excluded from economic analyses and policy considerations. This exclusion entrenched the notion that care work was secondary and subordinate to income-generating labour. As a result, the gendered division of labour became institutionalized, limiting women's access to education, professional opportunities, and public life while reinforcing their dependence on male earners. These developments continue to echo in contemporary societies, where caregiving remains disproportionately assigned to women and undervalued despite its critical role in sustaining economies and communities.

(A) Colonial and Post-Colonial Narratives

The gendered division of labour took on additional layers of complexity in colonial contexts, such as India, where caregiving roles were shaped by caste, class, and gender hierarchies. During British colonial rule, existing societal norms were manipulated to serve the colonial agenda. Upper-caste women were idealized as symbols of domesticity, confined to household roles that signified cultural and moral purity. In contrast, lower-caste and marginalized women faced the dual burden of unpaid caregiving in their own homes and exploitative labour in wealthier households or colonial enterprises. These dynamics were not incidental but instrumental in sustaining colonial systems that relied on the exploitation of marginalized communities.

For instance, domestic workers in colonial India, many of whom belonged to lower castes, were

often required to provide emotional labour in addition to physical tasks, serving as caretakers for children and companions for colonial families (Nair, 1996). This dynamic not only reinforced caste-based inequities but also institutionalized emotional labour as an unrecognized and unvalued contribution to colonial households. Similarly, in Caribbean colonies, enslaved women were burdened with caregiving responsibilities for their oppressors' families while also attending to their communities' needs, highlighting the intersection of race, gender, and economic exploitation (Beckles, 1989).

In the post-colonial era, many of these inequities persisted, adapting to new socio-economic and political contexts. Marginalized women continue to face disproportionate burdens in caregiving roles, both unpaid and underpaid, reflecting the enduring legacy of colonial exploitation. The intersection of caste, class, and gender remains a significant factor in shaping the distribution of care work in contemporary India, where systemic inequities limit the recognition and valuation of care labour. These historical and structural inequities reveal the deep entrenchment of patriarchal norms and the need for transformative approaches to caregiving.

(B) Structural Inequalities and Emotional Labour

The historical relegation of care work to the private sphere has significant implications for understanding emotional labour in the present day. Women's association with caregiving has normalized societal expectations that they provide emotional labour as a natural extension of their roles. This normalization has led to the widespread invisibility of emotional labour in economic and policy frameworks, perpetuating its undervaluation. For example, studies have shown that female nurses and teachers are often expected to go beyond their professional duties by offering emotional support to patients and students, a responsibility rarely acknowledged or compensated (Guy & Newman, 2004).

Emotional labour also intersects with systemic inequalities, particularly those rooted in caste and class. Marginalized women, often employed in domestic work or caregiving roles for wealthier households, are expected to provide both physical and emotional labour under exploitative conditions. These expectations are compounded by socio-economic vulnerabilities, which limit their ability to negotiate better terms or seek alternative opportunities. For instance, domestic workers in urban India frequently report being expected to maintain a cheerful and submissive demeanor, reflecting their employers' demands for emotional labour in addition to household chores (Neetha, 2004).

The undervaluation of emotional labour also reflects broader societal biases that prioritize economic productivity over relational and emotional contributions. Caregiving roles, often

dismissed as unskilled, require significant emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal skills—qualities that are systematically overlooked in patriarchal frameworks. This devaluation not only undermines the contributions of caregivers but also perpetuates gendered hierarchies that limit women's autonomy and socio-economic advancement. Recognizing emotional labour as an essential component of care work is crucial to challenging these inequities and reshaping societal attitudes toward caregiving.

The historical context of gendered care work reveals a pattern of systemic marginalization rooted in patriarchal and colonial structures. From the communal caregiving of pre-industrial societies to the rigid gendered division of labour introduced by industrialization and reinforced by colonial systems, the undervaluation of care work has persisted across centuries. Emotional labour, an integral yet invisible aspect of caregiving, remains a site of exploitation and inequity, particularly for marginalized women. Addressing these historical legacies is essential to reimagining caregiving in ways that promote gender equity, economic justice, and societal well-being. Recognizing the value of emotional labour and care work is not merely a matter of justice but a necessary step toward creating more inclusive and equitable societies.

III. EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND GENDER ROLE REINFORCEMENT

Emotional labour plays a significant role in reinforcing traditional gender roles, acting as both a reflection and an enforcer of societal norms. This phenomenon is deeply embedded in the social, economic, and intersectional frameworks of caregiving, perpetuating systemic inequities. By unpacking its various dimensions, we can better understand how emotional labour solidifies gendered expectations and limits progress toward equality.

(A) Social Norms and Expectations

The association between women and caregiving is entrenched in societal norms that frame caregiving as a natural extension of femininity. From a young age, girls are socialized to prioritize empathy, patience, and relational harmony—qualities that align closely with the demands of emotional labour. This socialization not only normalizes but also naturalizes women's disproportionate engagement in caregiving, thereby reinforcing patriarchal structures. Mothers, for example, are often expected to bear the dual responsibility of providing physical care and nurturing emotional well-being within the family. This dual burden, often described as “invisible work,” highlights the significant yet unacknowledged effort women contribute to sustaining social cohesion (Hochschild, 1983).

This expectation extends into professional spaces, where women are frequently assigned roles requiring emotional labour, such as conflict resolution or employee morale maintenance. A

2004 study by Guy and Newman found that women in workplaces were disproportionately tasked with emotionally intensive responsibilities that were undervalued and unrewarded. These societal and workplace norms reinforce the idea that emotional labour is a woman's duty, limiting their autonomy and perpetuating systemic inequities by constraining opportunities for personal and professional advancement.

The normalization of these expectations is further exacerbated by cultural attitudes that glorify caregiving as a moral virtue for women. For instance, in many societies, fathers who actively engage in caregiving are celebrated, while mothers performing the same tasks are seen as merely fulfilling their roles. This double standard not only devalues women's contributions but also discourages men from participating equally in caregiving, thereby entrenching traditional gendered divisions of labour.

(B) Economic Disempowerment

The economic implications of emotional labour are equally profound, perpetuating cycles of financial dependence and vulnerability for women. The significant time and energy women dedicate to caregiving—often unpaid—limit their participation in the formal labour market. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women account for 76.2% of all unpaid care work globally, a disparity that restricts their economic independence and career advancement (ILO, 2018). As a result, women are often left financially dependent on male counterparts, undermining their bargaining power within households and society at large.

This systemic undervaluation of emotional labour is particularly evident in professions dominated by women, such as nursing, teaching, and social work. Despite the emotionally intensive nature of these roles, they are often underpaid compared to male-dominated fields requiring similar skills. For example, a report by the OECD highlights that care-related professions are consistently undervalued in economic terms, perpetuating wage gaps and economic inequities (OECD, 2019). This structural bias against care work not only limits women's economic opportunities but also reinforces the societal perception that emotional labour is unskilled and unworthy of adequate compensation.

Economic disempowerment is further compounded by inadequate social policies. The absence of comprehensive parental leave, affordable childcare, and eldercare services disproportionately affects women, forcing them to bear the majority of caregiving responsibilities. These systemic barriers not only limit women's financial autonomy but also perpetuate the stereotype that caregiving is inherently their responsibility, reinforcing traditional gender norms in both the public and private spheres.

(C) Invisibility and Devaluation

One of the most insidious aspects of emotional labour is its invisibility, both within households and in broader societal structures. The framing of caregiving as “unskilled” work effectively devalues women’s contributions, marginalizing their efforts in policy discussions and economic frameworks. For instance, caregiving’s exclusion from GDP calculations obscures its true economic and social value. Studies suggest that if unpaid care work were properly valued, it would constitute approximately 13% of global GDP, underscoring its critical but unrecognized role in sustaining economies (OECD, 2019).

This invisibility extends to professional environments, where emotional labour is often an unspoken expectation rather than a recognized skill. For example, women in managerial roles are frequently expected to mediate conflicts, mentor colleagues, and maintain team morale without these efforts being formally acknowledged or rewarded. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle of invisibility and devaluation, as emotional labour remains excluded from traditional metrics of productivity and success.

Moreover, the systemic neglect of emotional labour in policymaking further entrenches gender inequalities. Public policies rarely account for the emotional and relational dimensions of caregiving, focusing instead on its physical and logistical aspects. This narrow approach fails to address the broader emotional toll of caregiving, leaving women unsupported and overburdened.

(D) Intersectional Dimensions

The burden of emotional labour is not distributed equally among women; it intersects with factors such as race, class, caste, and sexual orientation to create diverse and often compounded experiences. Marginalized women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, as they are disproportionately represented in low-paid or unpaid caregiving roles. In India, for instance, lower-caste women working as domestic helpers are often expected to provide emotional support in addition to physical tasks, such as maintaining a cheerful demeanour and offering empathy to their employers (Neetha, 2004). This dual expectation underscores the intersectional nature of emotional labour, revealing how caste and class hierarchies exacerbate its inequities.

Similarly, LGBTQ+ individuals face unique emotional labour demands, often navigating stigma and societal expectations in addition to their caregiving responsibilities. For example, queer individuals in heteronormative societies may feel compelled to suppress their identities or mediate familial conflicts, adding layers of emotional labour to their already challenging circumstances (Misra, 2020). These intersectional dimensions highlight the need for nuanced

approaches to addressing the inequities of emotional labour, as one-size-fits-all solutions fail to capture the complexities of diverse lived experiences.

IV. IMPACTS OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR ON WOMEN

The pervasive demands of emotional labour have far-reaching consequences for women, extending beyond their immediate caregiving roles to affect their mental health, professional opportunities, and societal status. While caregiving is often framed as a fulfilling or natural role for women, the systemic undervaluation and invisibility of emotional labour impose significant psychological, economic, and social burdens. These impacts are not isolated incidents but manifestations of deeply entrenched gender norms and structural inequalities that shape women's lived experiences. By critically examining these dimensions, this section explores how emotional labour reinforces systemic inequities, perpetuates gendered vulnerabilities, and hinders progress toward gender equality.

(A) Mental Health Costs

The psychological toll of emotional labour is one of its most profound impacts on women. Constantly managing one's emotions to meet societal or familial expectations can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Women who engage in caregiving roles, particularly those involving intensive emotional labour, often report feelings of burnout and diminished self-worth. For example, studies on nursing professionals—a field dominated by women—reveal high rates of burnout due to the dual demands of emotional and physical caregiving (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). This phenomenon is not confined to professional settings; unpaid caregivers, such as mothers or those caring for elderly relatives, face similar mental health challenges.

The cumulative effects of these psychological pressures can have long-term consequences, including depression and decreased life satisfaction. The lack of societal and institutional support exacerbates these issues. For instance, unpaid caregivers often lack access to mental health resources, leaving them to cope with these challenges in isolation. Moreover, societal expectations that frame caregiving as a moral obligation rather than a skilled endeavor further discourage women from seeking help or voicing their struggles, perpetuating a cycle of emotional invisibility and neglect.

The systemic neglect of the mental health impacts of emotional labour underscores broader societal failures to value caregiving. While significant attention is given to physical caregiving tasks, the emotional dimensions remain unacknowledged, leaving caregivers vulnerable to emotional fatigue. This oversight reveals a need for structural changes that include accessible

mental health support and recognition of emotional labour as a legitimate and demanding aspect of caregiving.

(B) The Double Burden

Women often face a “double burden,” balancing paid employment with unpaid caregiving responsibilities. This dual expectation stems from entrenched gender norms that position women as primary caregivers, regardless of their professional commitments. For instance, women employed in full-time jobs are statistically more likely to shoulder the majority of household caregiving duties compared to their male counterparts. According to a report by the International Labour Organization (2018), women globally spend three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men, even when both are engaged in full-time employment.

This double burden not only limits women’s professional opportunities but also takes a toll on their physical and emotional well-being. Women often experience role strain, a phenomenon where the competing demands of work and caregiving lead to stress and decreased productivity in both spheres. For example, a working mother managing childcare, eldercare, and a full-time job may find herself perpetually overextended, resulting in diminished career advancement opportunities and poorer mental health outcomes.

The economic consequences of this double burden are equally significant. Women are more likely to opt for part-time work or career breaks to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, leading to wage gaps, reduced retirement savings, and long-term financial insecurity. This phenomenon not only entrenches economic inequalities but also reinforces the perception that caregiving is inherently a woman’s duty, discouraging men from sharing these responsibilities.

(C) Generational Cycles

The normalization of emotional labour as a female duty perpetuates generational cycles of inequality. Daughters who observe their mothers shouldering the bulk of caregiving responsibilities often internalize these gendered expectations, continuing the cycle into their own adult lives. This transmission of norms is not merely cultural but structural, as societal institutions fail to challenge or disrupt these patterns. For instance, traditional educational systems rarely incorporate gender-equitable approaches to caregiving, implicitly reinforcing the idea that emotional labour is a woman’s responsibility.

Generational cycles are particularly evident in familial contexts, where caregiving roles are passed down from one generation to the next. For example, in many cultures, elder daughters are expected to assist in caregiving tasks, while sons are given greater freedom to pursue personal and professional ambitions. This division of labour perpetuates gendered expectations

and limits the aspirations of young women. A 2015 study by Craig and Mullan found that girls as young as eight years old spend significantly more time on household chores and caregiving compared to boys, highlighting how early these patterns are ingrained.

Breaking these cycles requires systemic interventions, such as promoting gender-equitable parenting practices and implementing policies that support shared caregiving responsibilities. By challenging deeply ingrained norms, society can begin to dismantle the intergenerational transmission of emotional labour as a gendered expectation.

V. FEMINIST CRITIQUES AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Feminist scholarship has been instrumental in unpacking the systemic inequities embedded in emotional labour, offering a range of theoretical frameworks to analyse its implications. These perspectives emphasize the need to challenge traditional gender norms, recognize the value of caregiving, and advocate for transformative changes in both policy and societal attitudes. By situating emotional labour within broader socio-economic and cultural contexts, feminist critiques expose its role in perpetuating structural inequalities while envisioning pathways toward greater equity and justice.

(A) Marxist Feminism: Emotional Labour and Capitalist Exploitation

Marxist feminists have long argued that emotional labour underpins capitalist economies by ensuring the reproduction of the workforce at little to no cost. This framework views caregiving as essential yet unrecognized labour, revealing how capitalism systematically exploits women's unpaid contributions. Silvia Federici's seminal work, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), highlights how the unpaid domestic work performed by women subsidizes male workers' productivity, effectively sustaining capitalist systems.

The invisibility of emotional labour in economic metrics such as GDP further underscores its exploitation. Despite its critical role in maintaining societal cohesion and productivity, caregiving is dismissed as unskilled and natural, perpetuating its exclusion from economic valuation. This omission has profound implications, from reinforcing gendered wealth gaps to limiting women's access to social protections like pensions and healthcare, which are often tied to formal labour market participation.

Additionally, the commodification of care work in capitalist economies has led to a global care chain, where women from economically disadvantaged regions, often in the Global South, are employed as domestic workers in wealthier nations. These women take on the emotional and physical caregiving roles of others while leaving their own families behind, creating a cycle of

exploitation that spans global inequalities (Hochschild, 2000). This phenomenon highlights the intersection of capitalism and emotional labour, emphasizing the urgent need for structural reforms.

(B) Intersectional Feminism: Accounting for Diverse Experiences

Intersectional feminism provides a nuanced lens to understand emotional labour by considering how overlapping systems of oppression—such as race, class, caste, and sexuality—shape women's experiences. *Kimberlé Crenshaw's* work on intersectionality underscores the importance of recognizing these intersecting identities to fully grasp the inequities embedded in caregiving roles (Crenshaw, 1989).

For example, African-American women in the United States have historically occupied roles as domestic workers, balancing the emotional and physical demands of caregiving for white families under exploitative conditions. Evelyn Nakano Glenn's *Unequal Freedom* (1992) highlights how these roles were racialized, reinforcing systemic inequalities in both the labour market and societal perceptions of care work. Similarly, in India, Dalit women often engage in caregiving tasks for upper-caste families, navigating both caste-based discrimination and gendered expectations. These examples illustrate how emotional labour is not a monolithic experience but one deeply influenced by intersectional oppressions.

Furthermore, the LGBTQ+ community faces unique emotional labour demands. LGBTQ+ individuals often engage in extensive emotional management to navigate heteronormative societal norms, maintain familial relationships, and combat stigma. This added layer of emotional labour, often invisible to mainstream feminist discourse, underscores the importance of intersectionality in addressing caregiving inequalities.

(C) Postmodern Feminism: Deconstructing Norms and Reimagining Care

Postmodern feminism challenges the traditional narratives that frame emotional labour as a natural or inherently female duty. By deconstructing these essentialist views, postmodern feminists advocate for a reimagining of caregiving as a shared and collective responsibility, not confined by gender. This perspective calls for the disruption of binary frameworks and the promotion of caregiving as a human endeavour.

For instance, Judith Butler's concept of performativity (1990) can be applied to caregiving, suggesting that the repetitive enactment of gendered caregiving roles creates the illusion of their naturalness. By disrupting these performances, postmodern feminism opens space for rethinking caregiving roles and responsibilities. Policies in countries like Sweden, which promote equitable parental leave and encourage men to participate in caregiving, exemplify

how societal structures can be reimagined to redistribute emotional labour.

Additionally, postmodern feminism critiques the commodification of emotional labour in professional settings, such as customer service roles or domestic work. It highlights how these roles often require workers to suppress their emotions to meet organizational demands, creating a form of emotional exploitation. By advocating for workplace policies that recognize and compensate emotional labour, postmodern feminism challenges the devaluation of this essential work.

VI. PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

i. Recognition and Redistribution

Achieving gender equity requires the recognition of emotional labour as valuable and indispensable work that sustains both households and economies. Feminist scholars, such as Silvia Federici (2004), have argued that the invisibility of emotional and caregiving labour in economic systems perpetuates the undervaluation of women's contributions, both at home and in the workplace. By acknowledging emotional labour as skilled and essential, society can begin to dismantle the structural inequities that treat caregiving as a "natural" duty for women rather than a shared responsibility. This recognition must be accompanied by redistribution—policy interventions that encourage equitable caregiving roles. For instance, countries like Sweden have implemented paid parental leave policies that incentivize men to participate in caregiving, demonstrating how structural reforms can challenge entrenched gender norms (Butler, 1990). Redistribution is not only a matter of equity but also a strategy to reduce the physical and emotional toll on women, fostering better outcomes for individuals and families alike.

ii. Education and Awareness

A critical pathway to change involves challenging deep-seated gender stereotypes through education and awareness campaigns. Gendered expectations surrounding emotional labour are often perpetuated through socialization, where children internalize norms about caregiving roles from a young age. For example, Craig and Mullan (2015) highlight how girls as young as eight are more likely to be assigned caregiving tasks compared to boys, reinforcing the notion that emotional labour is inherently female. Educational reforms must address these disparities by promoting gender-equitable curricula that teach the value of shared caregiving responsibilities. Media campaigns can also play a pivotal role in reshaping societal perceptions, as demonstrated by initiatives like UN Women's #HeForShe campaign, which encourages men to actively participate in caregiving and domestic work. Such interventions not only shift public attitudes but also create a cultural environment conducive to more equitable divisions of labour.

iii. Support Systems

The systemic undervaluation of emotional labour has left caregivers without adequate support systems, exacerbating mental health challenges and economic vulnerabilities. Maslach and Leiter's (2016) research on burnout in caregiving professions underscores the importance of mental health resources in mitigating the psychological toll of emotional labour. For unpaid caregivers, such as mothers or those caring for elderly relatives, the absence of institutional support further compounds these challenges, leading to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion. Robust support systems are essential for addressing these gaps. Workplace policies that include flexible hours, paid family leave, and access to mental health services can alleviate the burden of balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities. Community-based support networks, such as caregiving cooperatives or local respite care programs, can provide much-needed relief to unpaid caregivers, fostering resilience and reducing isolation.

iv. Policy Interventions

Governments must take a proactive role in addressing the structural barriers that sustain the inequitable distribution of emotional labour. Legal frameworks that promote equitable caregiving practices are essential for driving systemic change. For example, the International Labour Organization (2018) highlights the need for policies that address the "double burden" faced by women, such as subsidized childcare services, eldercare support, and equitable parental leave. Public investment in caregiving infrastructure not only reduces the burden on individuals but also creates economic opportunities by formalizing caregiving roles, offering fair wages, and recognizing caregiving as skilled labour. Additionally, intersectional policy approaches are necessary to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, such as women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Addressing these intersecting oppressions ensures that reforms are inclusive and equitable, leaving no one behind.

VII. CONCLUSION

Emotional labour, while frequently invisible and undervalued, is a significant mechanism that sustains patriarchal systems by reinforcing traditional gender roles and exacerbating systemic inequalities. Its psychological, economic, and socio-cultural impacts disproportionately burden women, limiting their mental well-being and professional opportunities while simultaneously entrenching their roles as primary caregivers. This analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of emotional labour, revealing how it perpetuates inequities through both structural neglect and cultural normalization. Addressing this issue requires transformative measures that go beyond

superficial recognition. Redistribution of caregiving responsibilities, enhanced support systems, and targeted policy interventions are essential steps toward dismantling the systemic barriers that reinforce caregiving as a natural female obligation.

Feminist critiques provide crucial theoretical frameworks for understanding and addressing the inequities rooted in emotional labour. Marxist feminism exposes how capitalism exploits women's unpaid caregiving work to sustain economic systems while denying them compensation or recognition (Federici, 2004). Intersectional feminism brings to light the compounded challenges faced by women at the intersections of race, class, caste, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989), while postmodern feminism critiques the essentialist framing of caregiving as a female responsibility and calls for its reimagining as a shared, human duty (Butler, 1990). These perspectives emphasize the need for systemic, intersectional, and cultural transformations that not only challenge entrenched gender norms but also create equitable and sustainable frameworks for caregiving. Such changes are critical to redefining emotional labour as a shared societal responsibility, paving the way for greater justice and collective well-being.

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