



Gendered Patterns of Productive and Reproductive Work in Rural India: Evidence from the Time Use Survey 2024

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Abstract

This paper examines gendered patterns of productive and reproductive work in rural India using published estimates from the Time Use Survey (TUS) 2024. Using descriptive aggregate data, it compares men's and women's participation and time allocation across major activities, SNA and non-SNA production, and the 1,440-minute day, with selected comparisons to TUS 2019. The findings reveal a pronounced gendered organisation of work: men are more concentrated in employment and SNA production, while women participate substantially more in non-SNA production, unpaid domestic services and caregiving. When SNA and non-SNA production are considered together, women show higher participation and average time among participants. The findings indicate modest change alongside persistent gender differentiation, highlighting the importance of examining the composition and allocation of productive time beyond employment-based measures.

Keywords: Time use; unpaid work; SNA and non-SNA production

1. Introduction

Women's work in rural economies extends well beyond participation in paid employment (Reddy et al., 2021; Vemireddy & Pingali, 2021). Standard indicators of economic activity tend to privilege market-oriented production and may therefore understate forms of work undertaken outside the labour market, including unpaid domestic services, caregiving and production for own final use (Durazo et al., 2021; Gautham, 2022). This narrow conceptualisation of work has a long history of feminist scholarly critique, while time-use research has demonstrated the implications of excluding unpaid activities for understanding gender

inequalities in work and economic participation (Elson, 2017; Hirway, 2015). India's first nationally representative Time Use Survey (TUS), conducted in 2019, similarly documented substantial gender differences in participation in and time devoted to unpaid work, particularly in unpaid housework and care work (Janiso et al., 2024; Sahu, 2024).

Time-use analysis provides an important complement to employment-centred measures by placing different forms of activity within a common temporal framework (Srija & Vijay, 2020; Charmes, 2019). It allows examination not only of whether individuals are economically active, but also of how the finite resources of the day are allocated across employment, own-use production, domestic services, caregiving, learning, leisure and other activities. This perspective is particularly relevant in rural areas, where productive and household activities are often combined within the same livelihood system. Evidence from rural India and Nepal suggests that women combine productive roles with substantial reproductive and care responsibilities, creating competing demands on their time and reducing opportunities for leisure (Picchioni et al., 2020).

The literature based on India's 2019 TUS has considerably advanced understanding of the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. Studies have documented substantial gender differences in unpaid domestic and care work (Janiso et al., 2024; Sahu, 2024), examined patterns of paid, unpaid and total work, and explored factors associated with women's allocation of time to unpaid activities (Sinha et al., 2024). Earlier work on time-use measurement in India has likewise demonstrated that women's work cannot be fully understood through conventional labour-market indicators alone (Hirway, 2015). While emerging analyses of the 2019 TUS have examined paid and unpaid work and differences between SNA and non-SNA production, less attention has been given to their joint organisation within the finite time of the day (Srija & Vijay, 2021; Swaminathan, 2020). This distinction is important because the gendered division of productive work can appear substantially different depending on whether production is considered narrowly within the boundary of the System of National Accounts (SNA) or alongside activities classified as non-SNA production.

The release of India's second national Time Use Survey, conducted during January-December 2024, provides an opportunity to revisit these questions using updated national evidence. The survey covers the population aged six years and above and records participation and time allocation across employment, production for own final use, unpaid domestic and caregiving services, and other activities, while distinguishing SNA and non-SNA production (MoSPI, 2025). The 2024 survey is particularly relevant for examining rural gender differences because it permits comparison of participation rates, time spent among participants and average time allocation across the population within a common 24-hour framework. The availability of comparable 2019 estimates also allows assessment of whether broad gendered patterns have changed or persisted.

Against this background, this paper examines gendered patterns of productive and reproductive work in rural India using published estimates from the Time Use Survey 2024. It focuses on three related questions: how rural men and women differ in participation across major forms of activity; how the composition of productive time changes when SNA and non-SNA production are considered together; and how these activities are distributed within the 1,440-minute day. The paper also compares selected participation patterns between 2019 and 2024. Rather than treating paid employment and unpaid work as mutually exclusive domains, the analysis

considers them as interconnected components of gendered time allocation. It argues that examining the organisation of the entire working day provides a more comprehensive understanding of rural women's contribution to production and household reproduction than employment-based measures alone.

2. Conceptual Perspective: Productive and Reproductive Work

The distinction between productive and reproductive work is central to feminist analyses of gender inequality because unpaid reproductive activities are closely intertwined with, yet remain analytically distinct from, market-oriented production (Folbre, 2006; Rai et al., 2014). Conventional economic measures have historically privileged activities associated with market production and monetary exchange, while unpaid domestic and care activities performed within households have remained comparatively invisible in measures of economic activity. Feminist economic scholarship has challenged this boundary by demonstrating the economic and social significance of unpaid work and its links with the conventional economy (Hirway & Jose, 2011; Hirway, 2015). Time-use statistics are particularly valuable in this regard because they make visible activities that may remain under-recorded in conventional labour statistics and allow their distribution across population groups to be examined systematically.

Productive work may be understood broadly as activities contributing to the production of goods and services, whether undertaken for the market or for household use (ILO, 2016), whereas reproductive work encompasses activities necessary for maintaining households and reproducing everyday life, including domestic work and caregiving (Rai et al., 2014). These spheres should not, however, be treated as completely separate, as the boundaries between productive and reproductive activities are often blurred in agrarian contexts (Swaminathan, 2020). Rural livelihoods may combine market-oriented production, production for own use, domestic work and care within the same household and, in some cases, within the daily routine of the same individual (Swaminathan, 2020). Evidence from rural communities in India and Nepal demonstrates that women combine productive roles with substantial reproductive and care responsibilities, creating competing demands on their time and limiting opportunities for leisure (Picchioni et al., 2020).

This paper therefore approaches the duality of work as a problem of gendered time allocation rather than a simple opposition between paid and unpaid work. This distinction is important because the statistical boundary between SNA and non-SNA production does not map neatly onto the conceptual distinction between productive and reproductive work (ILO, 2013; Charmes, 2019). Production for own final use, for example, may fall within SNA production, while unpaid domestic and caregiving services are classified as non-SNA production. The analytical task is therefore not to collapse these categories, but to examine how different forms of work are distributed across the finite time available to rural men and women. Evidence from India's 2019 TUS demonstrates substantial gender differences in paid, unpaid and total work, while research on unpaid housework and care work shows that women bear a disproportionately greater time burden (Sahu, 2024; Janiso et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the present study uses the 1,440-minute day as an integrating analytical frame. Rather than treating employment, own-use production, domestic work and caregiving as isolated activities, it examines how their gendered distribution produces distinct patterns of daily time allocation. This approach shifts

attention from whether women participate in paid work to the broader question of which forms of work occupy their time and how these forms coexist within the same day.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Data source and study population

The analysis uses published aggregate estimates from the Time Use Survey (TUS) 2024, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), during January-December 2024. TUS 2024 is India's second national time-use survey following the 2019 survey and records time-use information for household members aged six years and above. Information was collected for a 24-hour reference period extending from 4:00 a.m. on the day preceding the interview to 4:00 a.m. on the interview day. Activities were classified according to the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS) 2016 (MoSPI, 2025). The present study focuses exclusively on the rural population, with gender as the principal dimension of comparison. This national rural focus deliberately avoids state- or district-level comparisons and permits examination of broad gendered patterns of time allocation.

3.2 Measures and analytical approach

Three measures reported by TUS 2024 are used. Participation rate refers to the percentage of persons who performed a particular activity during the reference period. Average time spent per participant measures the time devoted to an activity among those who participated in it, while average time spent per person reports the average time allocated to an activity across the population, irrespective of participation. The latter measure provides the basis for examining the allocation of the 1,440-minute day, as it incorporates both participation and the time devoted to an activity.

The analysis proceeds descriptively in three stages. First, gender differences are examined across the nine major ICATUS activity divisions. Second, productive activity is examined through the TUS distinction between SNA and non-SNA production, considering both participation and time intensity. Third, per-person estimates are used to examine the gendered allocation of the 24-hour day. Selected 2019 estimates are used to identify broad changes and continuities between the two survey rounds. Gender gaps are presented as percentage-point or minute differences, as appropriate.

4. Results

4.1 Gendered participation and intensity of work

The distribution of participation across major activity categories reveals a distinctly gendered organisation of daily time in rural India (Table 1).

Table 1. Gendered Participation and Time Use across Major Activity Categories in Rural India, 2024

S N	Activity	Participation rate (%)			Average time per participant (minutes/day)		
		Male	Female	Female-Male gap (pp)	Male	Female	Female-Male gap (minutes)
1	Employment and related activities	60.4	21.9	-38.5	451	322	-129
2	Production of goods for own final use	17.4	25.8	+8.4	142	111	-31
3	Unpaid domestic services	26.5	81.8	+55.3	88	291	+203
4	Unpaid caregiving	18.2	34.8	+16.6	76	135	+59
5	Unpaid volunteer/other unpaid work	0.9	1.1	+0.2	140	107	-33
6	Learning	23.2	20.3	-2.9	413	412	-1
7	Socialising and communication, community participation and religious practice	89.7	90.4	+0.7	143	140	-3
8	Culture/leisure/mass media/sports	94.8	88.8	-6.0	174	155	-19
9	Self-care & maintenance	100.0	100.0	0.0	715	707	-8

Source: National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Time Use in India, 2024, Statements 1 and 2.

Note: Participation rate refers to the percentage of persons aged 6 years and above who participated in the respective activity during the 24-hour reference period. Average time spent per participant refers to the average time devoted to the activity among participants. Figures are reported for the rural population and are based on activities recorded during the reference period.

Gender differences are concentrated primarily in the organisation of work rather than extending uniformly across all spheres of daily activity. The strongest differences occur between employment-oriented activities and unpaid domestic and caregiving work. Rural men participate more strongly in employment and related activities, whereas women are substantially more engaged in unpaid domestic and caregiving activities. Production for own final use represents an important intermediate category, with female participation exceeding male participation. By contrast, participation in activities such as learning, socialising and communication, and culture and leisure is less differentiated by gender.

Differences are also evident in the intensity of participation. Among those undertaking the respective activities, men devote considerably more time to employment-related activities, while women spend substantially more time on unpaid domestic services and caregiving. The contrast is particularly pronounced for domestic work, indicating that the gender difference reflects not only who undertakes particular activities but also the time intensity associated with them. At the same time, relatively small differences in activities such as learning and social interaction suggest that the gendered pattern is not simply a generalized difference in time availability. Rather, it is concentrated around particular forms of productive and reproductive work.

4.2 The Composition of Productive Work: SNA and Non-SNA Production

A clearer picture of the gendered organisation of work emerges when productive activity is examined beyond the conventional System of National Accounts (SNA) boundary (Table 2). SNA production remains more strongly associated with men, whereas non-SNA production is predominantly undertaken by women. When participation in SNA and non-SNA production is considered together, however, the gender difference narrows substantially, with women's participation exceeding that of men. The contrast therefore reflects not simply differences in whether individuals engage in productive activity, but differences in the form through which productive activity is organised and classified within the TUS framework.

The time-intensity estimates reinforce this distinction. Among participants, men's productive time is concentrated more heavily in SNA production, whereas women's time is considerably more concentrated in non-SNA production. When paid and unpaid components are considered together, the composition becomes even clearer: men's productive time is predominantly associated with paid activities, whereas women's productive time is predominantly associated with unpaid activities. The gender difference therefore concerns not only how much productive time is allocated, but also its economic and institutional composition. Thus, the lower female participation observed in employment-oriented activities coexists with a higher overall allocation of time to paid and unpaid activities when the two are considered together.

The large female concentration in non-SNA production is closely connected with unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Domestic services and caregiving display substantial gender differentiation, with activities such as food and meal management and preparation, household cleaning and maintenance, and childcare and instruction contributing to the observed pattern. Thus, non-SNA production is not simply a residual category of miscellaneous activity; it encompasses recurrent forms of household maintenance and care that are systematically organised by gender. The classification of these activities as non-SNA should not be interpreted as indicating an absence of economic or social value; rather, it reflects their location outside the SNA production boundary.

The evidence therefore qualifies a simple paid-unpaid interpretation of gendered work. Women's lower participation in employment does not imply an absence from productive activity. Instead, their productive engagement is more closely intertwined with unpaid household production and caregiving, while men's productive participation is more strongly concentrated in SNA-oriented and paid activities. The gender divide is consequently better understood as a differentiation in the composition of productive roles and time commitments.

Table 2. Gendered Composition of Productive Work in Rural India: SNA, Non-SNA and Paid/Unpaid Production, 2024**A. Participation and time intensity**

S N	Type of production	Male partici pation (%)	Female partici pation (%)	Female -Male gap (pp)	Male time* (min/da y)	Female time* (min/da y)	Female- Male gap (min)
1	SNA production	66.8	42.1	-24.7	392	216	-176
2	Non-SNA production	39.0	83.7	+44.7	97	341	+244
3	SNA and non-SNA production	74.3	85.1	+10.8	403	443	+40

*Average time spent per participant

B. Average Time Spent per Person in Paid and Unpaid Activities

SN	Components of Activity	Male (min/day)	Female (min/day)
1	Unpaid SNA production	25	29
2	Non-SNA production	38	286
3	All unpaid activities	63	314
4	Paid activities	237	62
5	Total paid and activities	300	377

C. Participation in SNA and non-SNA production, 2019 and 2024

SN	Type of production	Male 2019 (%)	Male 2024 (%)	Female 2019 (%)	Female 2024 (%)
1	SNA production	64.5	66.8	38.7	42.1
2	Non-SNA production	37.9	39.0	84.2	83.7

Source: National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Time Use in India, 2024, Statements 27, 28 and 37; Figures 22 and 23

Note1: Panel A reports participation rates and average time spent per participant based on all activities recorded in a time slot. Panel B reports average time spent per person in paid and unpaid production. Panel C reports participation rates for SNA and non-SNA production in 2019 and 2024.

Note2: Average time spent per person refers to the average time allocated across all persons, irrespective of whether they participated in the activity. Figures may not add up to 1,440 due to rounding.

The comparison with TUS 2019 further suggests considerable persistence in this underlying pattern. SNA participation increased between 2019 and 2024 for both rural men and women, while non-SNA participation changed only marginally. Thus, greater participation in SNA production among women has occurred alongside the continued prominence of their engagement in non-SNA production. Since the two rounds are repeated cross-sectional surveys rather than a panel of the same individuals, these comparisons are interpreted descriptively rather than as evidence of individual-level transitions or causal change.

4.3 The 1,440-Minute Day

The population-level estimates provide the clearest illustration of the gendered organisation of productive time (Table 3). When time is considered across the entire rural population rather than only among participants, the distribution of the 1,440-minute day differs substantially by gender. Men's daily productive allocation is more strongly concentrated in SNA production, whereas women's is more strongly concentrated in non-SNA production. The gender difference is therefore not captured adequately by participation in SNA production alone; it reflects a different composition of productive time across SNA and non-SNA activities.

Table 3. Gendered Allocation of the 1,440-Minute Day in Rural India, 2024

S N	Activity	Male (min/day)	Female (min/day)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1	SNA production	262	91	18.2	6.3
2	Non-SNA production	38	286	2.6	19.9
3	SNA + non-SNA production	300	377	20.8	26.2
4	Residual other activities	1,140	1,063	79.2	73.8
5	Total	1,440	1,440	100.0	100.0

Source: National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Time Use in India, 2024, Statements 29 and 30.

Note: Average time spent per person refers to the average time allocated across all persons, irrespective of whether they participated in the activity. Estimates consider all activities recorded in a time slot. Figures may not add up to 1,440 due to rounding.

As shown in Table 2, this broader daily pattern corresponds to a pronounced gender difference in the paid and unpaid composition of productive time. Viewing the complete daily allocation therefore makes visible forms of productive contribution that employment-centred measures are less able to capture.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the gendered organisation of rural work operates through the allocation, intensity and classification of productive time. The distinction between SNA and non-SNA production is consequently central to understanding the apparent gender gap in productive participation. A broader time-use perspective does not eliminate the gender divide; rather, it reveals that the divide takes different forms across the SNA and non-SNA components of production.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that gender differences in rural work cannot be adequately understood through employment participation alone. Rural men are more strongly concentrated in employment and SNA production, whereas women participate more extensively in non-SNA production and unpaid domestic and caregiving activities. This pattern is consistent with evidence that conventional employment measures capture only part of women's economic contribution and can obscure substantial unpaid work (Rajeev & Sinha, 2024; Sahu, 2024; Sreejith, 2025). The results therefore reinforce the value of time-use statistics for examining gendered work beyond labour-market participation.

The distinction between SNA and non-SNA production provides a particularly useful interpretation of this pattern. Women's participation in non-SNA production is substantially higher than their participation in SNA production, while the combined measure of SNA and non-SNA production shows higher participation among women than men. The gender divide therefore concerns not simply whether individuals engage in productive activity, but the form through which productive activity is organised and classified. Evidence from rural Arunachal Pradesh similarly identifies a substantial gender differentiation in unpaid and non-SNA work, reinforcing the importance of examining productive and household activities together in rural contexts (Gurung, 2024). Recent analysis of Indian time-use data similarly highlights the contribution of unpaid activities to women's work and the importance of the SNA/non-SNA boundary in interpreting this contribution (Sreejith, 2025). The paid-unpaid composition further sharpens this distinction: women's productive time is predominantly associated with unpaid activities, while men's is more strongly associated with paid activities. Evidence from India also suggests that participation in paid employment does not necessarily displace women's existing domestic responsibilities, with care work remaining strongly feminised among employed women (Majumder & Som, 2025). The present findings are therefore better interpreted as evidence of differentiated allocation across forms of work rather than simply different levels of work intensity.

The 1,440-minute perspective extends this interpretation by showing how productive and reproductive responsibilities coexist within the same daily time constraint. Women allocate a larger share of the day to combined SNA and non-SNA production, while men's productive time is more concentrated in SNA production. This has implications beyond the allocation of labour because time devoted to unpaid care and domestic responsibilities may constrain opportunities for employment, education, leisure and other activities. Evidence from the 2019 TUS shows an inverse association between women's unpaid care time and employment, self-employment and higher education (Tripathi et al., 2024). Similarly, Sinha et al. (2024) find that greater caregiving is associated with lower labour-market participation, reduced time for self-care and socialising, and poorer reported well-being. These studies provide an important context for the present findings, although the current analysis does not directly estimate time poverty, opportunity costs or well-being outcomes.

The persistence of unpaid responsibilities alongside women's participation in paid work is also evident in recent research using the 2024 TUS. Sethy et al. (2026) report that employed women continue to experience a substantial double burden, with the relationship between employment and unpaid work varying across employment and educational characteristics. The present findings similarly indicate that increased participation in SNA production should not automatically be interpreted as a corresponding withdrawal from non-SNA production. Rather, women's engagement across these domains may coexist within the same daily allocation of time. This reinforces the importance of considering the quantity and composition of work simultaneously when assessing gender differences in rural time use.

The comparison between 2019 and 2024 points to change at the margin alongside persistence in the broader gendered organisation of work. Female participation in SNA production increased, while participation in non-SNA production remained very high. This pattern is consistent with evidence from the 2019 TUS showing

that rural women bear a particularly high burden of total work and that gender differences in unpaid care remain pronounced (Sahu, 2024). Evidence that structural transformation does not necessarily reduce women's unpaid work further suggests that greater participation in market-oriented activities need not automatically displace household responsibilities (Chakraborty & Sutradhar, 2023). The findings therefore suggest that greater engagement in market-oriented production has occurred alongside continued responsibility for household production and care rather than necessarily replacing these activities.

These findings should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. The 2019 and 2024 surveys are repeated cross-sectional surveys rather than a panel of the same individuals. The observed differences therefore cannot establish individual-level transitions or demonstrate that increased SNA participation caused changes in women's time allocation. They instead indicate that the aggregate gendered structure of rural work has remained persistent while some forms of participation have changed. Further research using individual-level time-use data could examine how these patterns vary across household, employment and socioeconomic contexts and whether the observed allocation of time translates into differences in time poverty and well-being.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the gendered organisation of productive and reproductive work in rural India using published estimates from the Time Use Survey 2024. The findings show that gender differences in work are not adequately captured by employment participation alone. Rural men remain more strongly concentrated in SNA and paid activities, while women participate substantially more in non-SNA production and unpaid domestic and caregiving work. When SNA and non-SNA production are considered together, women's participation and time allocation are higher, demonstrating that the apparent gender gap in productive engagement depends strongly on how production is defined and measured. The 1,440-minute perspective further shows that women allocate a larger share of the day to combined productive activity, but much of this time is located in unpaid forms of work. The comparison with 2019 indicates some increase in women's participation in SNA production alongside the continued prominence of non-SNA work, pointing to change at the margin rather than a fundamental transformation of the gendered organisation of time.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that understanding rural women's contribution to the economy requires attention not only to whether they participate in paid work, but also to where productive and reproductive responsibilities are located within the working day. Time-use statistics provide an important basis for making this distribution visible, particularly where household production and care coexist with market-oriented activity. The findings also underline the need for policies addressing women's economic participation to consider the unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities that shape their available time. While the analysis is descriptive and based on aggregate survey estimates, and therefore cannot establish causal relationships or individual-level changes, it demonstrates the value of viewing gendered work through the complete allocation of the 1,440-minute day. Future research using individual-level TUS data could build on this framework by examining differences across socioeconomic groups, employment types and household contexts, and by investigating how these patterns relate to time poverty and well-being.

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