



CENTERING CARE AND MEN'S ROLES IN CAREGIVING

From Dialogue to Action:
Insights & Directions

Centering Care and Men's Roles in Caregiving

Caregiving and our capacity to care for others whether for children, partners, friends, elders, communities, or the planet - is integral to our survival and well-being. However, women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid caregiving.

Equimundo-led State of the World's Fathers report 2023 affirmed that an intersectional feminist vision of a care economy needs men and boys to value care work, do an equal share of unpaid care work, and advocate alongside women for equitable care policies and inclusive workplaces. The global report was based on data from 17 countries, including India. To build on this insight, ICRW and Equimundo, with support from Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, conducted a qualitative study in India. This research delved into the meaning of caregiving for men and women in India and identify underlying factors, including normative and structural issues, that influence men's involvement (or lack of it) in caregiving (see Box 1 for India study).



"The complexity of the gig economy and its connection to gender roles raises concerns about whether breaking free from traditional roles might lead to greater exploitation within a system that prioritizes hyper-growth and production over well-being."
– Natasha Joshi

India Study: Methodology and Key Findings:

The India study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. A quantitative survey of 830 participants (72% men and 28% women) was conducted via telephone across five states—Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu—from December 2022 to January 2023. The survey tools were developed by Equimundo and MenCare Partners Council, with rigorous training and quality checks. In May 2024, qualitative data was gathered through 13 focus group discussions (6 with men and 7 with women) and 12 in-depth interviews (4 with women and 8 with men) across four states - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Jharkhand - in-person.

The study revealed that caregiving remains shaped by traditional gender norms, with tasks often assigned based on perceived capabilities rather than equity. While men self-reported involvement in caregiving for children and elderly parents, women continue to bear the majority of household responsibilities. Financial provision is seen as central to the role of a “good father,” while caregiving inequities are often unrecognized, reflecting deeply ingrained beliefs. The study also highlights a promising shift in attitudes, with growing acceptance of men's participation in caregiving and the associated benefits for themselves, their children, and their partners. This presents valuable opportunities to challenge traditional norms and advance equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities through programming, responsive policies, and robust evidence generation.

Link: [Men in Caregiving- Insights from India.pdf](#)



Box 1

“Care work discussions must go beyond fatherhood and childcare, addressing the broader manifestations and nuances of caregiving... intersection between Samaaj (society), Sarkar (state) and Bazaar (market) deeply impact how care is defined and experienced by women and men”. – Ravi Verma

Although small in scope, the India data revealed how masculinity and gender norms profoundly shape men's and women's roles and, by implication, shape attitudes and possibly impact policies and programs towards 'care' and 'caregiving'. Dominant norms define men's primary role as earners and providers of the family, with minimal or no expectations to provide unpaid care or engage in caregiving, which remains predominantly a women's responsibility. Significantly, men expressed support for equity, and many thought they were providing care, yet they contributed minimally to unpaid care work.

To reflect on the India study findings and to appropriately re-frame the issue of care and caregiving within the broader context of gender norms and masculinity, ICRW, Equimundo and RNP organized a moderated discussion on November 28, 2024. The event brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including researchers, academicians, civil society organization representatives working on care and caregiving, media experts and individual professionals working at the intersection of gender and women's economic empowerment. The event also had representatives from international organizations and advocates.

More than 50 participants, representing various organizations or in their individual capacities participated in this brainstorming consultation. While RNP set the larger context, ICRW and Equimundo presented the findings to trigger the discussion. A panel discussion and an open-house session followed the findings and initial queries. The following section highlights discussions and collective reflections without attributing them to specific individuals or organizations involved.



"Changing social norms with men requires long, intensive, and extensive programs; it cannot happen overnight. Care discourse and engaging men in care giving should be seen as strategy to promote gender equality and not limited to achieving short-term economic gains". – Satish Singh

Re-framing of Care, Caregiving, and Care economy – What is Men's Role in it?

Participants validated the study's core finding, expressing discomfort with the current discourse that reduces 'care' to 'care work', making it predominantly an economic construct freeing it from gender roles. Concerns emerged about whether moving beyond gender roles might lead to exploitation in the current economic structure which prioritizes hyper-growth and production over well-being.

The discourse on care and the framework of the care economy often underplays the significance of emotional investment, communication, and empathy between spousal relationships, where gender complexity truly lies. Participants highlighted that care is deeply tied to emotions, connection, and inadvertently to mental health, yet these aspects are rarely addressed or integrated within the policy and programmatic frameworks of care economy. Recognizing that masculinity profoundly shapes men's and women's roles, the current framing of care often limits men's emotional growth and perpetuates rigid norms. The study findings, panelists, and participants reaffirmed that men predominantly see themselves as financial providers, while women are viewed as nurturers. The skewed framing aligns with the political economy that perpetuates gendered ways of caregiving to enhance economic outcomes/outputs.

In the reframed narrative, care and the care economy are positioned as shared responsibility and a strategy to promote gender equity. This requires a fundamental rethinking of the economic system and its impact on both men and women. Participants and panelists shared how current patterns/modes of evidence-building, narrative creation, and programming have often reinforced rigid gender norms and masculinities. These outcomes have consequently worked to the detriment of women, men, and other genders with intersecting marginalizations that need care. We elaborate on these points below.



"Care and empathy have been key to human survival, as noted by Sarah Hrdy. We need to tap into this inherent ability." – Taveeshi Gupta

Evidence Building: What needs to change?

A key point raised was who conducts research and who has access to it, Responsibility for research is crucial, especially in the context of the relationship between research and policy. At the same time, research spaces should be expanded to bring in diverse and non-stereotypical experiences. Questions were raised about whether current studies are pushing boundaries of understanding or are reinventing existing knowledge. Caregiving dynamics in unique contexts, such as double-income or no-income couples without children, or those living under different family structures and with varying employment and migration trends could reveal critical insights. These are the contexts that are likely to challenge traditional gender roles and may encourage men to take equal responsibility for caregiving.

The need for deeper, contextual evidence across different sections of society, including urban and rural settings, as well as among people with varying identities, such as gender, caste, religion, and migration, emerged as a critical area for further exploration. Research on non-binary families, for example, can provide a broader perspective on masculinities and what care means in those contexts. The gig economy presents layers of complexities as increasing number of women gig workers need care support.

There is a need to examine how caregiving can be a vehicle for men and boys to gain respect in their communities while challenging rigid gender roles. The current normative frame creates a tension between the man's caregiving role and the societal expectation for men to be financial providers. The parental leave policies and provision for sick leave to care for family members need to be assessed for its effectiveness and risks.

Understanding how men utilize their paternity leave is crucial for evaluating policies that promote shared caregiving responsibilities. It's also important to evaluate the economic impacts of caregiving policies, such as fully paid and non-transferable leave, on household labor dynamics and workplace culture. By examining men's participation in caregiving during their leave, we can identify areas for improvement to support all caregivers effectively.

We also need to explore men's roles in early childhood caregiving and the effects of emotional bonding on men, including reducing stress, mental health benefits and relationship improvements. Overall, studies zooming-in at the intersection of power and care can bring out meaningful insights and may have larger implications in terms of household dynamics and spousal relationships.

"Supporting men who break gender norms through community-building is essential to ensure they do not feel isolated." – Devyani Sreenevasan

Narrative Building through Storytelling

Storytelling has transformative power to reshape societal norms around caregiving and masculinity. The role of media and visuals play a crucial role in creating narratives that challenge stereotypes and promote gender equity.

Assessing media portrayal is crucial in understanding how storytelling can challenge stereotypes, particularly through digital platforms that engage young men in rethinking/reframing caregiving norms and practices. Narratives must address systemic biases perpetuated by traditional media, such as the portrayal of men as sole providers or protectors. Showcasing positive role models where men actively engage in caregiving can normalize these behaviors.

Storytelling should highlight caregiving as skilled and meaningful work emphasizing its emotional dimensions and how it fosters empathy, strengthens family bonds, and enriches men's lives, thereby valuing unpaid caregiving.

Culturally relevant and locally contextualized narratives must resonate deeply with diverse audiences. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube can be leveraged to reach younger generations, using short, engaging formats that align with their media consumption habits.

Storytelling can act as a catalyst for change, ensuring policy reforms and community programs of equitable caregiving dynamics support it.



"India is so diverse that notions of care and fathering will be quite nuanced....in villages, men often take care of kids while women work outside, even in states like Haryana challenging the imagery of traditional masculinity." - Ravinder Kaur

Programming and advocacy:

The economic framing of care influences how programs engage men. To translate the new framing of masculinities in care and caregiving work, programs must rethink gender relations intentionally and plan the redistribution of care work based on the lived realities of men women and other genders in varied contexts and settings.

Early and sustained interventions are essential to ensure the importance of emotional caregiving alongside physical tasks. These interventions should begin in early childhood particularly during infancy, to foster father-child bonding. These efforts must target young boys and continue into adolescence encouraging caregiving as a natural role. Normalizing caregiving at home can create long-term change not only for boys but also for girls, as research shows that gender identity begins to form as early as four or five years old. Early interventions are therefore crucial in challenging traditional gender norms and shaping equitable caregiving practices. Workplace interventions, such as fully paid, non-transferable paternity leave, can encourage men's participation in caregiving without financial or social stigma and normalize caregiving for men, while also addressing workplace biases.

Data-driven advocacy is crucial for designing effective programs that address diverse socioeconomic contexts and influence caregiving practices and perceptions. Advocacy efforts should aim to influence policies and societal attitudes to create a supportive environment for equity in caregiving. Media collaborations can amplify positive narratives around men's caregiving roles which will create an ecosystem for normalizing the dynamics of caregiving. Grassroots level discussions are essential to challenge norms and build acceptance for shared caregiving.



"Not many men, particularly those working in informal section, have parental leave. Even those who have access and information may not be able to optimally utilize due to their own beliefs, organizational cultural or family dynamics." – Pranita Achyut

Conclusion

The consultation concluded with a strong call to balance simplicity and nuance in this work. Participants emphasized the need to focus on shared, effective actions without letting the pursuit of perfection stall progress. Identifying "quick wins" that unite diverse views and positions can help move forward the work centering men in care and caregiving. The discussion highlighted the many valuable resources and networks already in place and stressed the importance of connecting these resources more cohesively. Building a broader ecosystem of support, including donors, allies, and supporters, to contribute to long-term, sustainable efforts in this area.

Equitable caregiving is essential to achieving gender equality and creating compassionate communities. Reframing care, building contextual evidence, crafting impactful narratives, designing inclusive programs, and advocating for systemic change can pave the way for a society where caregiving is valued as a shared responsibility. This consultation serves as a starting point for conversations and actions to integrate gender and masculinities in the discourse on care and caregiving and the care economy.



"Striking the right balance between simplicity and nuance is key to meaningful progress. The challenge is to move forward with effective, shared actions, ensuring that the pursuit of perfection doesn't become the enemy of the good." – Natasha Joshi

Agenda

10:00 – 10:15	Context Setting – Natasha Joshi (RNP)
10:15 – 10:45	Men's Role in Caregiving Study (Presentation) - Pranita Achyut (ICRW) - Taveeshi Gupta (Equimundo)
10:45 – 11:00	Q&A
11:00 – 12:10	Panel Discussion - Moderator – Ravi Verma (ICRW) - Speakers – Prof. Ravinder Kaur (IIT, Delhi) - Devyani Srinivasan (Probex) - Prof. Indrani Gupta (IEG) - Satish Singh (CHSJ)
12:10 – 13:30	Open House - Moderator – Natasha Joshi (RNP) - Dialogue – Sonali Khan (SesameStreet) - Sarah Jacob (France 24) - Dilip Pattubala (Uninhibited)
13:30 – 13:35	Vote of Thanks
13:35 Onwards	Lunch & Networking

List of Participants

1. Anshul Tewari – Youth ki Awaaz
2. Chavi Vohra – Mobile Creches
3. Devyani Srinivasan – Probexme
4. Jocelyn Jose – Breakthrough
5. Mandira Kalaan – Purpose
6. Pritha Chatterjee – Breakthrough
7. Radha Chellappa – IWWAGE
8. Rohit – The YLAC Project
9. Sonali Khan – Sesame Street
10. Sumitra – Mobile Creches
11. Swetha Totapally – Dalberg
12. Yogesh – Vikalp
13. Sagar Sachdeva – YP Foundation
14. Subhalakshmi Nandi – Ford Foundation
15. Amita Motwani – Jesus and Mary College
16. Sarah Jacob – France 24
17. Prof. Ravinder Kaur – IIT Delhi
18. Satish Singh – CHSJ
19. Dilip Pattubala – Uninhibited
20. Indrani Gupta – IEG
21. Shrinivas – Azad Foundation
22. Shaliesh – Spectract
23. Hari Sharma – Azad Foundation
24. Shradhha Chiker – UNESCO
25. Tejwinder S Anand – PFI
26. Urvashi Wattal – JPAL SA
27. Taveeshi Gupta – Equimundo
28. Simran Verma – PFI
29. Natasha Joshi – RNP
30. Vandana Nair – C3
31. Abhishek Das – RNP
32. Andrea Wajnar – UNFPA
33. Mariya Rangwala – SEWA
34. Bethamehi – UNDP
35. Christopher Coley – Amrita University
36. Niharika Ravi – Gender Lab
37. Ekta – Praxis
38. Aditi Vyas – IWWAGE
39. Asma – YP Foundation
40. Chandini Noronha – Bridgespan
41. Roshni Mukherji – Dasra
42. Pravin Shinde – MAVA
43. Shobhana – UNFPA
44. Nandita Bhatla – World Being
45. Poonam Muttreja – PFI
46. Arushi Agarwal – Maraa
47. Sunayana Walia – Independent Consultant
48. Nikhil Taneja – YUVA
49. Sophiya Mathew – The Indian Express
50. Pranita Achyut – ICRW
51. Ravi Verma – ICRW
52. Arpit Singh – ICRW

"Fully paid, non-transferable paternity leave is a low hanging fruit that can ensure that men take their fully allocated paternity leave." – Taveeshi Gupta



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