

# What is care work?

Care work is the direct care of people — caring for children, the elderly, people with physical or mental disabilities, the sick, victims of crime, and so on. Care work activities include bathing, dressing, feeding, accompanying to appointments, keeping company, administering medications, counselling, teaching, and others.

### Care is an attitude and a way of doing things, as well as a form of work.

We all need care at some time in our lives, and we will, in turn, likely provide care to others. However, much of this care-giving falls to women. It is also frequently unpaid.

In this fact sheet we look more closely at care as a form of work in South Africa.

### Unpaid care work

Unpaid care work often takes place within families, households and communities. Because women have traditionally been seen as more emotional and nurturing than men, as well as more directly affected by childbirth and rearing, looking after children and others, as well as the home, has been seen as women's natural work. By contrast, the adult world outside the home has traditionally been seen as men's place. This is still very evident in contemporary South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

- Women spend more than triple the amount of time that men do on care-related work.
- Women spend more time than men do on care work and household maintenance regardless of income level, education level, employment status, age and geographic location (though the extent of the disparity differs).
- Three times as many women over the age of 18 participate in the care work than men (59.1% versus 18.8%).

Unemployed women spend a mean of 265 minutes daily on household maintenance, compared to unemployed men's 135 minutes. And 53 minutes on care of persons, as opposed to men's 11 minutes.

While the amount of time women spend caring for persons and/or undertaking household maintenance decreases when they are employed, there is still a disparity. Employed women spent an average of 21 minutes on caring for persons, versus employed men's four minutes. And 153 minutes on household maintenance compared to men's 66 minutes.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics South Africa (2013). *A Survey of Time Use, 2010*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

### Paid care work<sup>2</sup>

Women's greater involvement in care-related activities is also apparent in their paid work outside the home.

Paid care work can take place in the private, government and non-profit sectors. Those who can be classified as engaging in care work include domestic workers, childcare workers, nurses and others who care for those who are ill or disabled, people who work in institutions for the mentally ill or elderly, teachers and social workers.

While both women and men are represented in the paid care work sector, it is dominated by women and the work tends to be vastly undervalued and underpaid.

In 2011, 14.9% of women and 3.3% of men were employed in the private household/domestic work sector. A further 28.7% of women and 15.9% of men worked in the community and social services sector. Both sectors have a high concentration of care work roles. If we add these proportions together then these two sectors accounted for approximately 43.6% of women's employment compared to 19.2% of men's employment.

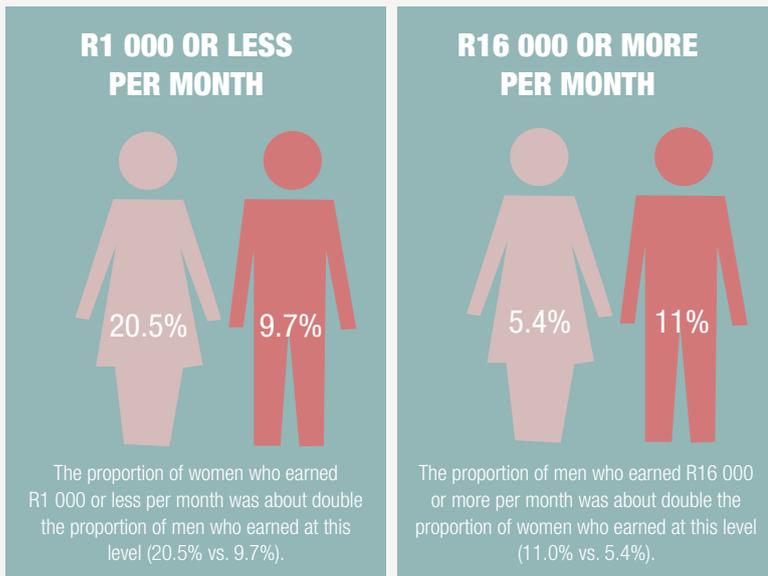
### The gender pay gap

While race continues to influence people's earnings in South Africa, so does gender. The gendered division of care work as well as its being under-valued both contribute to lower pay for women. Part of this pay gap is because men spend longer hours at paid work than women (254 minutes vs. 155 minutes), and women spend more time on unpaid care work in the home (253 minutes vs. 102 minutes) than men. But there is a gap in the earnings of employed men and women as well.

<sup>2</sup> The data in the sections "Paid care work" and "The gender pay gap" come from Statistics South Africa (2013). *Gender Statistics in South Africa, 2011*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa

the CARE WORK  
campaign

### Monthly earnings of employed women versus employed men (2011)



### Average hourly earnings of employees by gender and race category (2011)



The care work project is a partnership between the Shukumisa Coalition, the National Coalition of Social Services, the National Shelter Movement, the Eastern Cape Welfare Forum, the KwaZulu-Natal Welfare and Social Development Services Forum, and the Vhembe Civil Society Network. The project aims to ensure the availability of quality social services and promote the recognition of care work, which is largely performed by women.



### The care penalty<sup>3</sup>

The different kinds of work performed by men and women also contribute to the difference in their earnings.

**It is very possible that care work is paid less than many other forms of work.**

We can illustrate this care penalty through a comparison of the salaries of professional nurses and engineers. While both careers require similar amounts of education, expertise and training, nursing — a distinctly care-focused activity — is paid considerably less.

#### Comparing the salaries of nurses vs. engineers (2007)

<b>Professional nurses (91% female)</b>
Monthly income — 56% above R6 000, 1% above R16 001
<b>Associate nurses (89% female)</b>
Monthly income — 34% above R6 000, 1% above R16 001
<b>Professional engineers/architects (92% male)</b>
Monthly income — 65% above R6 000, 36% above R16 001
<b>Natural and engineering science technicians (68% male)</b>
Monthly income — 50% above R6 000, 8% above R 16 001

Though the factors that influence the gender pay gap are complex, there is no denying that care work, both paid and unpaid, contributes to this inequity.

3 (Lund F & Budlender D. (2009). Paid Care Providers in South Africa: Nurses, Domestic Workers, and Home-Based Care Workers. Research report 4 produced for United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva.)

#### What needs to change?

No society would survive if it did not care for its members. Yet caring for others has been made a form of gendered inequality in South Africa. To challenge this we need to:

- Take steps to educate people on the real value of care. It is worth much more than we're giving it credit for now. Address the realities of gender stereotypes and social norms and work together to change them so that care work responsibilities are better shared by men and women, and women are able to pursue all types of work.
- Adjust public policy to ensure that public care services are more widely available so the burden doesn't fall so hard on women.

#### For more information please visit:

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