

LEAP INSIGHTS · REPORT

Women's double burden in India continues over five years

Team LEAP

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1. Summary

Have working women's overall work hours in a day reduced over time? The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) Time Use Survey 2024 may suggest that but the reality is different. India has conducted two national Time Use Surveys, one in 2019 and another in 2024.

MoSPI issued its second report in 2025 and came up with seven key findings. This report revisits all seven of those findings, recomputes each of them from those records and attaches a margin of error to every comparison between the two rounds (2019 and 2024). Those margins distinguish a visible change in the published averages a difference large enough to carry statistical weight.

Two findings from MoSPI's official press note are noteworthy. The first finding records a rise in employment participation among women aged 15 to 59; the second records that women doing housework spend about ten lesser minutes a day on it. On that second finding, the press note rested its reading of a shift from unpaid to paid activities. The question, however, is whether that interpretation holds when the finding is considered alongside per-person women's daily activities and examined across the two samples.

They don't, for two reasons. The first reason concerns the basis of the ten-minute decline, an average taken amongst the women doing housework (per participant) rather than across all women aged 15 to 59 (per person) in the sample. When per person measure is taken the decline becomes smaller on account of a wider base.

The second reason concerns the coverage of the finding, housework being one of four types of unpaid work, which also includes own use production (like firewood), caregiving, volunteering and other works. When counted together on the measure in which a day's activities add up to a total of 1,440 minutes, women's overall unpaid work did not decline, because while housework declined, caregiving increased by a magnitude more than the decrease in housework. Less time in one category was accompanied by more time in another, and therefore combined total shows no measured reduction in statistical terms.

2. Key findings

Women's unpaid work did not fall. Between the two rounds housework fell by 6.6 minutes a day and caregiving rose by 12.5 minutes. Across all four kinds of unpaid work the total came to 366.6 minutes in 2024 against 363 in 2019. Since the difference of 3.6 minutes does not exceed its margin of error of 5.4 minutes it cannot be concretely said that there is any difference in terms of time spent on total unpaid work between the two surveys.

Men shifted their time. Women added to theirs. Men partly substituted their extra paid work (27 minutes increase) by doing 12 minutes less unpaid work. Women found no such saving, so for them the paid work was added, not exchanged.

The gender gap in unpaid work widened, and men are the reason. The men-women gap stood at 289 minutes a day in 2019 and 305 in 2024. While men's unpaid work fell by 12 minutes over two rounds; women's did not fall at all.

3. The Time Use Survey: definition and concept

A conventional labour survey asks about employment status and earnings and can therefore miss a woman spending her day in cooking, cleaning, collecting water or caring for children, none of that work being paid. A time use survey asks a different question: what did each person do during the previous 24 hours (1,440 minutes)? The survey records those activities in minutes.

The method rests on a simple fact. Everyone has the same 1,440 minutes in a day, and time spent on one activity cannot be spent on another, which is what allows the survey to answer a question no other instrument can. Given a rise in women's paid work, the survey shows which part of the day made room for it. Given a fall in their housework, the time released must appear somewhere else (say in another activity, or in another person's work day).

Because the survey measures every activity in the same unit, tasks that are otherwise hard to place alongside one another can be compared. The contrast is sharpest inside a single task. In the household, a woman's cooking for her family is generally invisible in national economic measures. In a restaurant, the same meal prepared by the same woman is counted. The activity is identical; only the payment differs. That line, between paid and unpaid work, is not the only one. A second runs inside

unpaid work itself and separates goods from services: food grown for the family to eat counts as production and enters the national accounts, whereas cooking that food does not. Housework and childcare are therefore absent from gross domestic product (GDP).

India ran a pilot survey in 1998–99 covered six states (Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Odisha and Tamil Nadu), the first national round came twenty years later in 2019, and the second in 2024. This report compares the two national rounds.

4. The headline story

MoSPI's 2025 press note based on the 2024 survey presented seven headline findings, of which two are noteworthy. The first concerned paid work: among people aged 15 to 59, employment participation rose from 70.9 to 75 per cent for men and from 21.8 to 25 for women between the two rounds.¹ The second was the fall in housework, from 315 minutes a day to 305, which the press note attributed to as a shift from unpaid to paid activities between the two rounds.

Read together, the two findings look like one story. More women took paid work, women who did housework spent less time on it. The two findings nevertheless count on different sets of parameters and therefore do not stand for a representative person, who can be followed for comparison. The first counts how many women did any paid work at all; the second counts minutes, that too only amongst the women who did housework. Neither follows a woman moving her own time from the second to the first, and that is the first limitation of the survey's headline story.

Second limitation is that unpaid domestic services is just one category of four different categories of unpaid work. These, according to the survey are; goods produced for the household's own use, unpaid domestic services, unpaid caregiving, and unpaid volunteering work. There is further categorisation. For instance, unpaid domestic services further includes tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping and repairs; unpaid caregiving includes looking after children, older people, people who are ill and others who need support; own-use production includes activities such as growing food for household consumption, tending animals, and collecting water and firewood.

5. Existing commentary on the press note

Several of the accounts that followed reached conclusions close to the claims of the last section, without distinguishing between the volume of unpaid work and its intensity.

Sunaina Kumar (2025), writing for the Observer Research Foundation, called the ten-minute fall marginal. She notes that clean cooking fuel, piped water, electrification and sanitation have all improved, and that the total work burden on Indian women has not decreased. She reads that as evidence that social norms have been resistant to change. Shreya Raman (2025), writing in BehanBox, gathered the methodological critics of the 2019 round, Indira Hirway (2022) being a prominent amongst them. She reported that problems highlighted by methodological critics had carried into 2024 and put women's unpaid work at the same level in both rounds. Neither adds the four unpaid categories together and neither attaches a margin of error to a comparison between the rounds.

Two readings go further into the survey's own figures. K. Prabhakar (2025) compares the two rounds nationally and describes a country in transition: real gains in women's employment set against an unpaid-work burden that has barely moved. His comparison of unpaid work rests on the per-participant series, as the official account does, and reports no margin of error. On that basis the rise in housework participation does not enter the picture, and the four unpaid categories are never summed. Ellina Samantroy Jena (2025) identifies the correction of most weight here, a fall in women's domestic work alongside a rise in their caregiving, and the analysis in this report aligns with her findings. Where this report differs is one of measure, not of arithmetic—per person and not per participant.

Apurva K. H. and Abhishek Sharma (2025) come closest in method to this report and arrive at a similar result. They work per person for age 6 and above, and count production for the household's own use as paid work rather than unpaid. Counted that way, women's paid work is 84 minutes a day in 2019 and 92 in 2024, and their unpaid work 282 and 284 respectively. This report's own figures for the same age, regrouped that way, are 282 and 283.3. They, however, report no margin of error and do not separate the 15-to-59 band the press note used for its headline findings. What their account establishes independently is the direction: women's paid time rose while their unpaid time did not fall.

Against a longer horizon, Nicholas Li (2023) compares the 1998–99 and 2019 rounds across the six states common to both. For women aged 25 to 59 he records a sharp fall in paid work, from 103 minutes a day to 64 but the domestic work

barely moves over the same period from 326 minutes a day to 323. That figure covers household work alone rather than the four unpaid categories this report adds together. So, his comparison is narrower than the one made here.

6. Three measures related to the same activity in the survey

- **Participation** is the share of people who did the activity during the survey day.
- **Minutes per participant** is the average time spent on an activity among those people who perform it. It measures the intensity of the activity.
- **Minutes per person** averages time spent on an activity by everyone in the group, counting zero for anyone who did not take part in the activity.

For women aged 15 to 59 doing unpaid domestic work in 2024:

Measure	The question it answers	2024
Participation	How many women did housework?	92.9%
Minutes per participant	How intense was housework for those who did it?	305 minutes
Minutes per person	How much of women's time went to housework?	283.4 minutes

Table 1. The same activity on all three measures: women aged 15 to 59 doing unpaid domestic work, 2024. Participation multiplied by minutes per participant gives minutes per person.

These three measures are locked together: the share of women who did housework, multiplied by the minutes those women spent on, gives the minutes per person.² Each of the measures is important in its own regard. The comparison between 315 (2019) and 305 (2024) minutes is the right measure for its own question, that of the intensity of housework (per participant estimate). This report consistently uses minutes per person for all its analysis.

Only one of the three measures (minutes per person) can be added up across all activities. Every person has 1,440 minutes in a day, the survey divides that day into nine activity groups (paid, unpaid and everything else), and only the per-person measure sums to exactly 1,440 minutes.³ If time in one activity rises, time in some other activity must fall on the same day.

7. Housework fell. Unpaid work did not.

According to survey the share of women aged 15 to 59 who did any unpaid domestic work rose from 92.3 per cent in 2019 to 92.9 in 2024, a rise of 0.6 points (margin of error of 0.4 percentage points)⁴.

For women aged 15 to 59, minutes per person:

Unpaid activity	2019	2024	Change
Own-use production	26.0	24.5	-1.5 (± 2.0)
Unpaid domestic work	290.0	283.4	-6.6 (± 4.6)
Unpaid caregiving	45.0	57.5	+12.5 (± 2.1)
Volunteer and other	2.0	1.2	-0.8 (± 0.2)
Total unpaid work	363.0	366.6	+3.6 (± 5.4)

Table 2. Women aged 15 to 59, minutes per person on each of the four kinds of unpaid work. Figures in brackets are 95 per cent margins; changes in bold exceed their own margin, and the total row is bold throughout.

Unpaid domestic work fell by 6.6 minutes a day⁵ and unpaid caregiving rose by 12.5 minutes. Across all four kinds of unpaid work the total came to 366.6 minutes in 2024 against 363 in 2019. That difference of 3.6 minutes does not, however, exceed its margin of error of 5.4 minutes. Hence it cannot be concretely said that there is any difference in terms of time spent on total unpaid work between the two surveys⁶. What changed was the composition of the day's activity. Women moved out of domestic tasks and into care.

8. Men substituted. Women added.

The figure and table below analyse men and women's full days, on per-person basis.

Men moved unpaid work into paid work. Women added paid work on top.

Minutes a day, ages 15 to 59, averaged over everyone in the group.

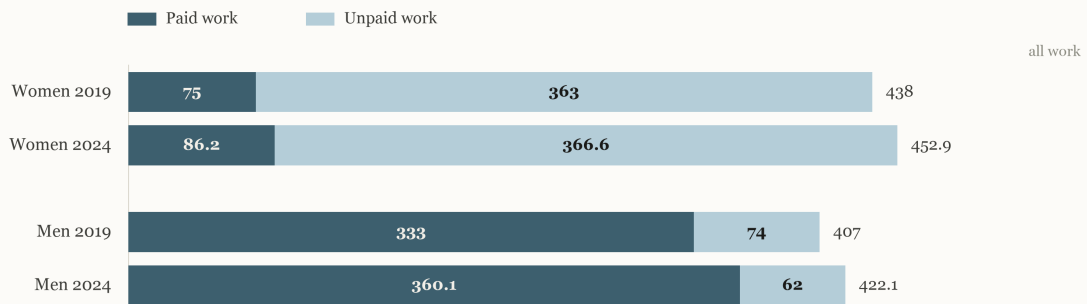


Figure 1. Paid and unpaid work, women and men aged 15 to 59, minutes per person, 2019 and 2024. Men's paid work grew as their unpaid work fell. Women's paid work grew while their unpaid work stayed where it was.

Age 15 to 59, minutes per person

Activity	Women 2019	Women 2024	Change	Men 2019	Men 2024	Change
Employment	75	86.2	+11.2 (± 4.4)	333	360.1	+27.1 (± 7.7)
Own-use production	26	24.5	-1.5 (± 2.0)	31	18.8	-12.2 (± 3.6)
Unpaid domestic	290	283.4	-6.6 (± 4.6)	28	26.2	-1.8 (± 1.3)
Unpaid caregiving	45	57.5	+12.5 (± 2.1)	12	15.8	+3.8 (± 0.9)
Volunteering, other	2	1.2	-0.8 (± 0.2)	3	1.2	-1.8 (± 0.3)
Learning	45	46.2	+1.2 (± 2.1)	60	54.7	-5.3 (± 2.1)
Socialising, religion	126	126.1	+0.1 (± 2.9)	137	125.2	-11.8 (± 3.6)
Leisure, culture, media	127	129.2	+2.2 (± 3.8)	125	148.0	+23.0 (± 3.4)
Self-care and sleep	704	685.6	-18.4 (± 3.3)	711	690.0	-21.0 (± 3.3)

Table 3. Women and men aged 15 to 59, minutes per person across the nine activity groups. The nine sum to 1,440 minutes, the length of a day. Figures in brackets are 95 per cent margins; changes in bold exceed their own margin.

Adding paid and unpaid work together:

	2019	2024	Change
Women, paid work	75	86.2	+11.2 (±4.4)
Women, unpaid work	363	366.6	+3.6 (±5.4)
Women, all work	438	452.9	+14.9 (±6.9)
Men, paid work	333	360.1	+27.1 (±7.7)
Men, unpaid work	74	62.0	-12.0 (±4.0)
Men, all work	407	422.1	+15.1 (±8.7)

Table 4. Paid and unpaid work added together, women and men aged 15 to 59, minutes per person. Figures in brackets are 95 per cent margins; changes in bold exceed their own margin, and the two total rows are bold throughout. Totals are computed from the underlying figures rather than by adding the rounded columns, so they can differ by a tenth from the sum of the printed parts.

Total working time rose by about a quarter of an hour for both men and women between two rounds. Also, the total work load difference between men and women barely moved between two rounds of Survey. (31 minutes in 2019 and 30.8 in 2024).

Men's paid work rose by 27.1 minutes while their unpaid work fell by 12.0 minutes; however, women's paid work rose by 11.2 minutes while their unpaid work did not fall. Men therefore traded unpaid work for paid work, whereas women added paid work on top of an unpaid load that did not give way. This clearly suggests the existence of double burden for women.

9. The unpaid gap widened because men did less

The press note reported that among caregivers aged 15 to 59 women spent twice the time men spent (about 140 minutes a day on care and men about 74 minutes). At per person level women averaged 57.5 minutes of care a day and men 15.8 minutes.

Again, measured at per person level in 2019 women aged 15 to 59 did 289 more minutes of unpaid work a day than men, which rose to 304.7 minutes more in 2024, widening the gap by 15.7 minutes (margin 6.7 minutes) between two survey rounds.

10. The seven findings, restated on one basis

So far this report has analysed two of the seven headline figures on per person basis. The other five figures can be read in the same manner. The table below exemplifies this. The basis also changes between items. The unpaid-work finding is stated per participant; the leisure finding is stated per person instead. Although the survey contains all three measures for both the rounds the press note uses all three at different places and does not stick to a consistent measure.

#	As published	Basis	The same data per person	2019 shown?
1	Employment, 15–59: men 70.9→75, women 21.8→25	headcount	Holds on every measure. Minutes rose 27.1 (± 7.7) for men, 11.2 (± 4.4) for women.	yes
2	Women 15–59, unpaid domestic 315→305, “signifying the shift from unpaid to paid activities”	per participant	The fall is 6.6 (± 4.6), not 10. All four unpaid categories together went 363→366.6, a change of +3.6 (± 5.4). Participation rose.	yes
3	Care, 15–59: women 41% and 140 min, men 21.4% and 74 min	per participant	57.5 against 15.8, a ratio of 3.6 to one, not 1.9. Change +12.5 (± 2.1) for women, +3.8 (± 0.9) for men.	no
4	Rural 15–59, own-use production: 24.6% and 121 min	per participant	39 → 29.8 per person.	no
5	Children 6–14, learning: 89.3% and 413 min	per participant	370 → 368.7 per person.	no
6	Leisure, 6+: 9.9%→11.0% of the day, “increased in both men and women”	per person	True per person: men +23.1 (± 3.7), women +7.3 (± 3.9). Per participant men rose 164→177 and women fell 165→164.	yes
7	Self-care, 6+: 708 min, women 706 and men 710	per participant	726→707.7. Everyone sleeps, so participation is 100 per cent and the two measures coincide.	no

Table 5. All seven findings as published in Press Information Bureau (PIB) press note PRID 2106113, 25 February 2025, each recomputed per person. Every published figure reproduces from the microdata. Margins are from published relative standard errors. The last column comments only where the choice of measure bears on the reading; elsewhere it gives the recomputed figure and leaves it there.

The reading that women moved from unpaid to paid work rests on one number:

315 minutes in 2019 against 305 in 2024, is counted only for the women who did housework, and covering only one of the four kinds of unpaid work. Counted across all women, and across all four kinds together, women's unpaid work did not fall.

11. Limits of the comparison

The two rounds are closely comparable. Both used a 24-hour diary day starting at 4 a.m., recorded activities in half-hour slots, allowed up to three activities per slot, and used the ICATUS 2016 classification; the 2019 round covered 447,250 people aged 6 and above (the 2024 round 454,192).

What the survey establishes is a difference observed between two years rather than causal relation. Nothing here shows that employment caused housework to fall, or that lighter housework led women to take work.

The survey has not covered what's happening inside a household. There is no accounting for a fall in one woman's load against a rise in another's. Abhilasha Srivastava's (2020) research on households where several generations live together shows why these matters: unpaid work is bargained among the women of a house, not only between women and men.

The five years are not, moreover, ordinary years. The 2019 round closed before the COVID pandemic and the 2024 round ran four years after it began, and in between came the lockdowns.

12. Conclusion

More women aged 15 to 59 did paid work in 2024 than in 2019, and women who did housework spent less time on it, 305 minutes a day in 2024 against 315 minutes a day in 2019. Both findings are plausible, the second figure, however, is a real measure of how intense housework is for the women carrying it.

Neither of the above figures, however, shows that women moved their time out of unpaid work and put into paid work. Housework did not become less common amongst women in 15-59 age group between the two rounds. The average woman's housework did not fall by ten minutes as highlighted in the Press note but by 6.6, and that women's unpaid work as a whole did not fall, unpaid care having risen by more than unpaid housework that dropped.

Overall workload in the household (paid and unpaid work) rose by about fifteen minutes a day for women and men alike. What differs is where those extra minutes came from. Men took them partially from their own unpaid work; women entered paid work without any measurable release from the unpaid work they were already doing.

Research conducted by research associate Sristi Sagar

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Appendix A. Minutes per person: Age 6 and above⁷

Activity	Women 2019	Women 2024	Change	Men 2019	Men 2024	Change
Employment	61	70.7	+9.7 (± 3.6)	263	287.5	+24.5 (± 7.4)
Own-use production	23	21.6	−1.4 (± 1.7)	28	17.8	−10.2 (± 3.2)
Unpaid domestic	243	235.6	−7.4 (± 3.7)	25	23.8	−1.2 (± 1.1)
Unpaid caregiving	37	46.5	+9.5 (± 1.7)	11	13.5	+2.5 (± 0.8)
Volunteering, other	2	1.2	−0.8 (± 0.2)	3	1.2	−1.8 (± 0.3)
Learning	84	83.8	−0.2 (± 3.4)	102	93.9	−8.1 (± 2.9)
Socialising, religion	127	126.1	−0.9 (± 2.9)	134	123.9	−10.1 (± 3.5)
Leisure, culture, media	141	148.3	+7.3 (± 3.9)	146	169.1	+23.1 (± 3.7)
Self-care and sleep	723	706.1	−16.9 (± 3.2)	729	709.3	−19.7 (± 3.2)

Table 6. Changes in bold exceed their own 95 per cent margin. The nine sum to 1,440 minutes, within rounding in the published 2019 integers.

Appendix B. Minutes per participant, 2019 → 2024

Activity	Women 15–59	Men 15–59	Women 6+	Men 6+
Employment	343 → 344	470 → 480	333 → 341	459 → 473
Own-use production	115 → 103	198 → 133	116 → 104	198 → 137
Unpaid domestic	315 → 305	95 → 86	299 → 289	97 → 88
Unpaid caregiving	137 → 140	73 → 74	134 → 137	76 → 75
Volunteering, other	100 → 110	103 → 149	99 → 108	102 → 139
Learning	414 → 411	421 → 422	423 → 413	426 → 415
Socialising, religion	136 → 135	146 → 135	139 → 139	147 → 138
Leisure, culture, media	151 → 145	144 → 156	165 → 164	164 → 177
Self-care and sleep	704 → 686	711 → 690	723 → 706	729 → 710

Table 7. Minutes per day among those who did the activity. 2019 from Table 7 of Time Use in India — 2019; 2024 from the microdata, with the 6+ columns as published in Table 2 of the February 2025 press note. These nine do not sum to a day, because each averages over a different group. For women aged 15 to 59 they sum to 2,415 in 2019 and 2,379 in 2024. Three of the 15 to 59 figures differ by a minute from those published in Time Use in India, 2024: women's volunteering (111 there), women's learning (412) and men's volunteering (150).

Appendix C. Participation rate, per cent, 2019 → 2024

Activity	Women 15–59	Men 15–59	Women 6+	Men 6+
Employment	21.8 → 25.1	70.9 → 75.0	18.4 → 20.8	57.3 → 60.8
Own-use production	22.7 → 23.7	15.6 → 14.2	20.0 → 20.8	14.3 → 13.1
Unpaid domestic	92.3 → 92.9	28.9 → 30.4	81.2 → 81.5	26.1 → 27.1
Unpaid caregiving	32.8 → 41.0	16.2 → 21.4	27.6 → 33.9	14.0 → 17.9
Volunteering, other	2.2 → 1.1	2.9 → 0.8	2.0 → 1.1	2.7 → 0.9
Learning	10.9 → 11.2	14.3 → 13.0	19.8 → 20.3	23.9 → 22.6
Socialising, religion	92.6 → 93.1	93.4 → 92.8	91.3 → 90.8	91.4 → 89.9
Leisure, culture, media	83.8 → 89.2	86.9 → 94.6	85.3 → 90.7	88.5 → 95.3
Self-care and sleep	100.0 → 100.0	100.0 → 100.0	100.0 → 100.0	100.0 → 100.0

Table 8. Share who did the activity at all during the 24 hours. 2019 from Table 6 of Time Use in India — 2019; 2024 from the microdata. Margins are left out of this table for room. The office publishes relative standard errors for participation as well as for minutes, and every participation change quoted in the text clears its margin.

Notes

[1] The press note rounds off its 2024 figures. Computed from the microdata they are 75.0 and 25.1 per cent.

[2] Minutes per person = participation rate $\times$ minutes per participant. For women aged 15 to 59 in 2024 the rounded figures give $0.929 \times 305 = 283.3$, and the unrounded rate and minutes give the 283.4 used in the tables.

[3] The survey sorts every activity into nine groups, following the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics 2016 (ICATUS 2016), the United Nations standard, used unchanged in both rounds. They are: employment and related activity; production of goods for own final use; unpaid domestic services; unpaid caregiving services; unpaid volunteer and trainee work; learning; socialising, community and religion; culture, leisure, media and sports; and self-care and maintenance. Together they cover the whole day and sum to 1,440 minutes per person.

[4] Both estimation notes stop at a single round. Neither gives a formula for the error on a change between rounds, and the office publishes none, so the margins on changes are constructed for this report. The two rounds are independent samples: each draws its first-stage units afresh from the Census 2011 frame and carries no households over from the other. Where the same village falls in both samples by chance, the margin comes out slightly wider than it need be rather than narrower. The variance of a difference between independent estimates is the sum of their variances. So $SE(\text{change}) = \sqrt{(SE_{2019}^2 + SE_{2024}^2)}$, each term taken from that round's published relative standard error, and the 95 per cent margin is 1.96 times that, on the usual normal approximation. That approximation is comfortable for the totals here and least so for the smallest figures, such as volunteer work at about a minute a day. Totals within a round are combined the same way: the error on a total is the square root of the sum of its components' squared errors. That step treats the activities as independent, which they are not. They compete for the same 1,440 minutes and so move against each other. Ignoring that makes the margin on a total wider than it should be, not narrower.

[5] Take 100 women. In 2019 about 92 did housework at 315 minutes each, which is 28,980 minutes, or 290 across all 100. In 2024 about 93 did it at 305 minutes each. The participant average fell by ten, but the group average fell by 6.6, to 283.4. The fall splits into a rise in participation adding 1.9 minutes, a fall in intensity subtracting 8.4, and a small interaction of -0.1 . The rates and minutes used here are the ones that reproduce the published per-person figures exactly. Computed instead from the published participant figures of 315 and 305, the same split gives 7.4 rather than 6.6, the difference being rounding in the 2019 tables.

[6] The office publishes errors for participation rates in a separate table, and those are used wherever a change in participation is quoted. The rounds also differed in how they were run: collection moved from paper to computer-assisted interviewing, the method of calculating variance changed, fewer answers came from proxy reporters, and recording shifted in the residual categories. None of that is captured by a sampling margin.

[7] Widening the band to age 6 and above dilutes both columns, since it adds children and older people who do less of everything. The pattern holds: men's employment up 24.5 minutes and their leisure up 23.1, women's care up 9.5 and their housework down 7.4. Appendix A gives the full table.