

# SHIFTING NARRATIVES TO VALUE UNPAID AND INFORMAL WORK IN KENYA: SUMMARY

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Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) and Paid Domestic Work (PDW) are essential to societal wellbeing. However, these activities often carry negative perceptions, attitudes and beliefs when performed by men and boys. As a result, women and girls typically shoulder the primary responsibility for performing UCDW. Similarly, society often undervalues PDW by perceiving it as low-skilled work, as demonstrated through low remuneration and unfair employment practices. The narratives many cultures embrace concerning UCDW and PDW partly explain why these essential activities frequently fall on women and girls, and why society often undervalues PDW. This report documents a collaborative research project between Busara Center for Behavioral Economics and Oxfam to investigate existing narratives on UCDW and PDW in Kenya, and test potentially transformative narratives that could shift societal attitudes.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) and Paid Domestic Work (PDW) form an essential part of societal wellbeing. However, these activities often carry negative perceptions, attitudes and beliefs when performed by men and boys. As a result, women and girls typically shoulder the primary responsibility for performing UCDW. Similarly, society often undervalues PDW by perceiving it as low-skilled work, as demonstrated through low remuneration and unfair employment practices. The narratives and mental models many cultures embrace concerning UCDW and PDW partly explain why these essential activities frequently fall on women and girls, and why society often undervalues PDW. Although these narratives are rooted deeply in social and gender norms, making them challenging to dismantle, several communication approaches have proven effective at shifting societies' knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of UCDW and PDW.

Last year, the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics and Oxfam commenced a five-phase research project to investigate existing narratives on UCDW and PDW in Kenya, and test potentially transformative narratives that could shift societal attitudes. The five phases of the research study were as follows:

- 1. Literature review:** Over 40 sources of existing literature on UCDW and PDW, including research papers, sector reports, academic studies and blog posts, were reviewed. The primary aim was to develop a thorough understanding of care and domestic work in the Global South, particularly in Kenya.
- 2. Qualitative research:** The goal of this phase was to develop a deep, nuanced understanding of prevailing narratives and frames around unpaid care and domestic work in Kenya. In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with 45 respondents across three Kenyan counties and Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with 10 key experts working in gender, labour, care and domestic work sectors in Kenya. The findings from the IDIs and KIs corroborated existing research and helped to map the current narratives about care and domestic work in Kenya.
- 3. Narrative development:** Nine transformative narratives on UCDW and PDW were developed following the insights from the IDIs and KIs. The goal of this phase was to identify narratives that best fit the Kenyan context and held strong potential to challenge and ultimately shift the existing perceptions surrounding care and domestic work in Kenya. After our analysis in this phase, we shortlisted five narratives to test in the next phase.
- 4. Design:** A co-design workshop was organized with local experts and stakeholders to discuss the five narratives shortlisted in the third phase. For this workshop, a participatory design approach was utilized to encourage collaborative discussions by reviewing the narratives uncovered during the research and developing strategies to deploy the counter-narratives. By the end of the co-design process, three frames for quick testing were prioritized in the validation phase.
- 5. Validate:** In the final phase, the potential impact of the prioritized frames on shifting narratives among target audiences was validated using qualitative testing (IDIs) and quantitative testing through a randomized control trial (RCT). For the IDIs, ten paid domestic workers and four key policymakers in Nairobi were interviewed. During the interviews, multiple frames and narratives were presented to participants and then participants were required to compare them. This process produced insight into which frames and narratives the participants preferred and how these narratives should be adjusted. Similarly, an RCT with a sample size of 3,124 respondents across seven regions in Kenya was also conducted. Participants initially completed a baseline survey to gauge their opinions about care and domestic work. Afterwards, these participants were randomly assigned to three treatment groups, each group presented with a different message frame on a vignette about John, a fictional Kenyan father deciding to engage in UCDW to develop a better relationship with his children.

- **Control:** participants in this group received a ‘gain frame’ vignette of John, as the narrative outlined the benefits of John’s involvement in UCDW, such as developing a better relationship with his children.
- **Treatment 1:** participants in this group received the ‘nudged-gain frame’ vignette of John. This narrative also highlights the benefits of John’s involvement in UCDW and included a call to action (CTA) advocating for societal change and normalizing a father’s caregiving responsibilities.
- **Treatment 2:** participants in this group received the ‘loss frame’ vignette of John. This narrative focuses on highlighting the negative consequences of John’s lack of involvement in his children’s lives, such as an increased chance of emotional and behavioural problems in a child.

After reading the narratives, participants completed the final survey. The analysis of the results from this study was used to quantify the frames’ impact on shifting narratives within a certain degree of confidence. The three narratives are highlighted in the table below:

**Table 1: Gain frame, nudged-gain frame and loss-frame narrative**

Gain-frame narrative <sup>1</sup>	Nudged-gain-frame narrative <sup>2</sup>	Loss-frame narrative <sup>3</sup>
<p>For so long, society believed that the role of a father was limited to providing for the family financially. Meet John, a hardworking dad who always puts in long hours at the office. He loved his job, but often felt guilty for missing out on important moments with his two children. One day, John decided to make a change. He talked to his boss about flexible work hours to be more present at home.</p> <p>To his surprise, John found that he enjoyed caring for his children by feeding, bathing and playing with them, and changing their diapers. He even started cooking and shopping for them. As a result, John’s relationship with his children grew stronger, and he felt more fulfilled as a father.</p> <p>This is not surprising as research suggests that fathers who are involved in their children’s lives tend to have closer, more supportive</p>	<p>For so long, society believed that the role of a father was limited to providing for the family financially. Meet John, a hardworking dad who always puts in long hours at the office. He loved his job, but often felt guilty for missing out on important moments with his two children. One day, John decided to make a change. He talked to his boss about flexible work hours to be more present at home.</p> <p>To his surprise, John found that he enjoyed caring for his children by feeding, bathing and playing with them, and changing their diapers. He even started cooking and shopping for them. As a result, John’s relationship with his children grew stronger, and he felt more fulfilled as a father.</p> <p>This is not surprising as research suggests that fathers who are involved in their children’s lives tend to have closer, more supportive</p>	<p>For so long, society believed that the role of a father was limited to providing for the family financially. Meet John, a hardworking dad who always puts in long hours at the office. He loved his job, but often felt guilty for missing out on important moments with his two children. One day, John decided to make a change. He talked to his boss about flexible work hours to be more present at home.</p> <p>To his surprise, John found that he enjoyed caring for his children by feeding, bathing, playing with them and changing their diapers. He even started cooking and shopping for them. As a result, John’s relationship with his children grew stronger, and he felt more fulfilled as a father.</p> <p>This is not surprising as research suggests that fathers who are not involved in their children’s lives tend to have distant, less supportive</p>

<sup>1</sup>The gain frame underscores the advantages or positive results from certain decisions or actions. In this case, the message points to the beneficial effects on children when fathers are actively involved in their lives.

<sup>2</sup>The nudged-gain frame combines highlighting positive outcomes with a call to action to adopt the desired behaviour. Here, the message not only showcases the benefits children experience when fathers are actively present, but also urges fathers to increase their involvement.

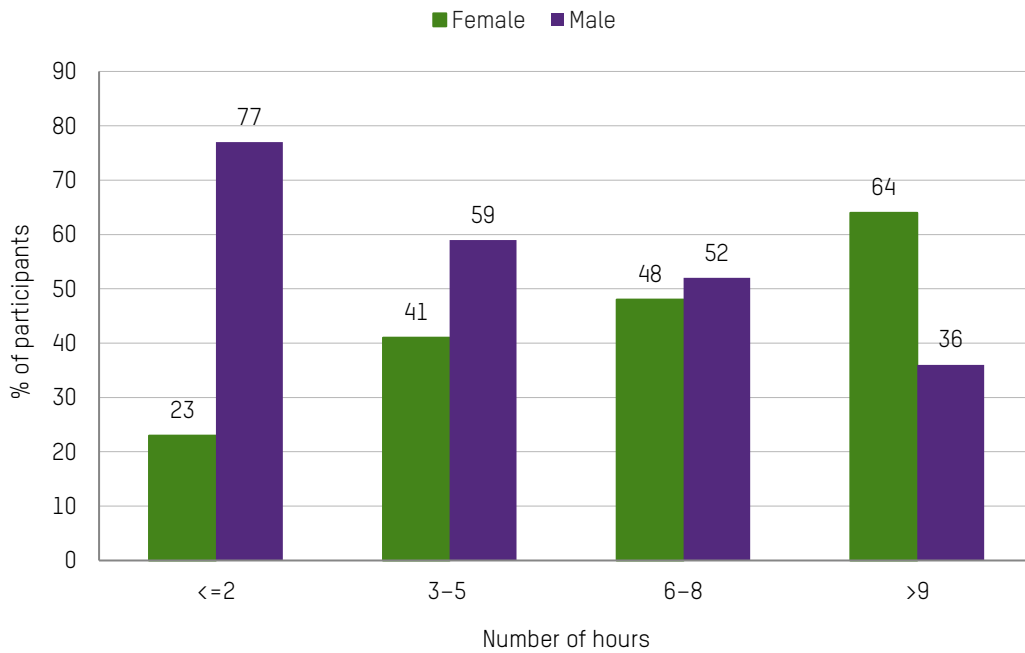
<sup>3</sup>The loss frame highlights the potential negative impacts from certain decisions or actions. Here, the message focuses on the challenges children encounter when fathers remain distant or less active in their lives.

<p>relationships with them which can lead to a range of benefits for both the father and the child. <i>(Positive frame: gaining a change to create a positive relationship between children and father).</i></p>	<p>relationships with them which can lead to a range of benefits for both the father and the child. <i>(Positive frame: gaining a change to create a positive relationship between children and father)</i></p> <p>It's time to break down stereotypes and support fathers in being actively involved in their children's upbringing. Let's normalize fathers cooking, feeding and bathing their children regularly. Let's encourage men in our families to play with their children, help them with homework or just have a conversation. By taking these simple steps, we are not only encouraging stronger relationship between fathers and children, but also helping to lay the foundation for a brighter future for both of them. So, don't wait any longer, take the first step today! <i>(CTA to nudge participants).</i></p>	<p>relationships with them which can lead to a range of negative consequences for both the father and the child. <i>(Negative frame: losing a chance to create a positive relationship between children and father).</i></p>
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Overall, the research findings revealed that the local language Kenyans use significantly shapes their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs on UCDW. For instance, many respondents believe no differences exist between care work and domestic work. Consequently, they often use the terms 'care work' and 'domestic work' interchangeably due to their overlapping meanings in the local language. Additionally, the language describing UCDW in Kenya is highly gendered. For example, society often refers to care and domestic work as 'women's work', creating social and cultural barriers for men who might want to perform these tasks. Men who carry out household tasks are often derogatorily labelled as '*amekaliwa*', '*wamekaliwa chapati*' or '*umeketiwa chapati*'. These terms imply that such men are being dominated or controlled by their wives, who are perceived as compelling them to undertake domestic work. Phrases like '*kazi chafu*' (dirty work) and '*kazi ya maid*' (maid's work) commonly describe the work performed by domestic workers. Interestingly, the language referring to female domestic workers, such as '*mboch*,' (domestic worker) carries derogatory undertones absent when describing male domestic workers, often called '*kijakazi*' (caretaker). This language use reflects societal biases and attitudes towards paid domestic workers, particularly females.

Like other UCDW studies, this research also found that Kenyan women spend more time on these tasks than men. The highly gendered language used to describe UCDW in Kenya contributes to this disparity. In our qualitative study, female respondents reported spending an average of 7.4 hours a day on UCDW and a similar amount on paid work. In contrast, men spent roughly half the time on UCDW (4.4 hours) and dedicated more hours to paid work (8.5 hours). Likewise, the quantitative study findings showed women investing an extra 100 minutes per day in household tasks. As the hours devoted to unpaid domestic work increase, the number of women performing this work also increases, while the number of men engaged in the same decreases.

**Figure 1: Number of hours spent on unpaid work**



Source: Joint research by Oxfam and the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics.

A deeper dive into societal attitudes towards UCDW and PDW in Kenya, and why Kenyan women bear the primary responsibility for UCDW revealed three primary behavioural barriers contributing to the undervaluing of UCDW and PDW nationally. Firstly, gender and social norms significantly shape perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward UCDW and PDW. Many respondents justified their beliefs around UCDW and PDW by citing societal expectations and cultural norms regarding the inherent roles of men and women.

Secondly, there exists a strong status quo bias among respondents, with the majority expressing a preference for maintaining current arrangements around UCDW. This preference, especially noticeable among employers of paid domestic workers when considering revising their remuneration, supports existing societal norms and gender roles.

Thirdly, the framing of narratives surrounding UCDW and PDW greatly contributes to their undervaluation in Kenya. This research identified several common narratives that continue to perpetuate these issues. For instance, society generally believes that women are better at care and domestic work and should bear its primary responsibility. The widespread belief is that performing unpaid care and domestic duties requires gender-specific innate abilities, and it is unmanly for a man to perform UCDW and PDW. Moreover, paid domestic work is perceived as a low-skilled occupation and a lifeline for the poor and uneducated.

Narratives significantly shape perceptions, attitudes and beliefs regarding UCDW and PDW in Kenya. Consequently, it is essential to develop effective counter-narratives using the message frame with the greatest potential for altering these perceptions. Insights from this research suggest that:

- A correlation exists between positively influencing participants' beliefs and their exposure to a counter-narrative, irrespective of the counter-narrative's message frame. For instance, when comparing baseline with endline responses across all the quantitative research questions asked, the endline survey received more responses disagreeing with the prevailing narratives than the baseline did.
- In addition, findings show that each of the three message frames tested – gain frame, nudged-gain frame and loss frame – shifted respondents' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about UCDW, depending on the context. For example:

- The gain-frame narrative proved most effective for measures requiring immediate changes in respondents' opinions, such as changing beliefs about a man's role in the household.
- The nudged-gain-frame narrative worked best for measures that required participants to take action, such as signing up for a workshop that teaches parents how to share responsibilities and engage in their child's life.
- The loss-frame narrative was most effective for measures that involved financially incentivized actions, such as donating to an organization that supports positive behaviour change.

Given these findings, it is recommended to adopt a comprehensive mixed-narrative strategy integrating gain, nudge and loss narratives in future efforts to shift perceptions. For instance, when trying to encourage the adoption of new, positive behaviour, a gain-framed narrative is most effective. This narrative can be used in interventions advocating for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of care and domestic work. A nudged-gain narrative is most effective when prompting participants to take specific active steps beyond merely shifting attitudes or beliefs. Hence, it suits interventions advocating for representation in care and domestic work. Finally, a loss-frame narrative, highly effective for measures involving financial decisions, would work best when motivating participants to reward care and domestic work. Also, three critical strategies must guide the crafting and dissemination of the developed counter-narratives:

- **Context-specific counter-narratives:** Given Kenya's diverse socio-cultural landscape, tailoring narratives to resonate within specific regional, religious or cultural contexts is crucial. Also, counter-narratives should incorporate local languages and dialects to ensure meaningful engagement.
- **Leverage relevant messengers:** Utilizing the right messengers can powerfully influence a shift in the perception of UCDW. Stakeholders such as religious leaders, educators, women group leaders, community leaders and employers of domestic workers could play a vital role in advocating for equitable practices in UCDW and PDW.
- **Utilize non-traditional methods for narrative dissemination:** In today's increasingly digital landscape, using relevant social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp can help spread these narratives to a wider audience.

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