

Estimated Value and Time Spent on Domestic Tasks and Caregiving

GAO-26-107871

September 2026

A report to the Ranking Member, Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate

For more information contact: Thomas Costa at CostaT@gao.gov or Michael Hoffman at HoffmanME@gao.gov

What GAO Found

Unpaid household work includes domestic tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, as well as caregiving. Studies show that supplementing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with the value of unpaid household work can provide a better understanding of the U.S. economy than GDP alone. For example, the decline in economic output during the COVID-19 recession was smaller when this value was included. Unpaid household work is not included in GDP because it takes place outside of formal market transactions and requires additional resources to calculate. According to economists GAO interviewed, valuing unpaid work can help inform policies that affect caregivers, such as policies intended to improve caregivers' financial security in retirement.

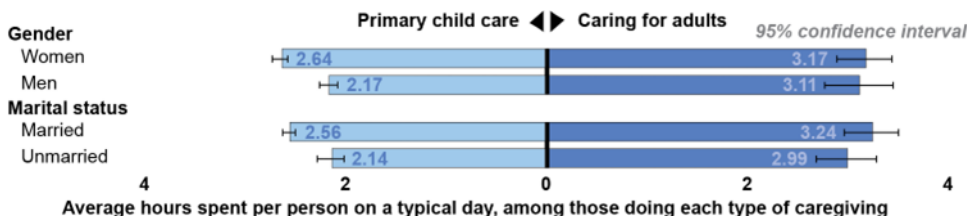
In a typical day, most individuals (87.3 percent) spent at least some time on household work—an average of about 3.72 hours, according to GAO's analysis of 2021–2024 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) data. In addition, GAO estimated that the national market value of unpaid household work was at least \$5.6 to 6.0 trillion in 2024 (which was equivalent to at least 19.2 to 20.2 percent of 2024 GDP). This estimated national market value includes the values of various types of unpaid household work, such as:

- **Domestic tasks:** \$4.3 to \$4.4 trillion (which was equivalent to 14.7 to 15.1 percent of 2024 GDP); and
- **Caregiving (caring for adults or caring for children as a primary activity):** \$1.1 to \$1.4 trillion (which was equivalent to 3.9 to 4.9 percent of 2024 GDP).

These estimated values do not include secondary child care, which is keeping an eye on children while engaged in other activities. Including secondary child care increases the estimated values of caregiving and of all unpaid household work.

GAO found certain groups were overrepresented among those engaged in unpaid household work from 2021–2024. For example, women made up about 53.9 percent of those engaged in this work, but 51.2 percent of the U.S. population. Also, women and married individuals spent more time on child care than men and unmarried individuals. However, women and men who cared for adults spent similar amounts of time doing so, as did married and unmarried individuals.

Time Spent on Unpaid Caregiving by Selected Characteristics, 2021–2024



Source: GAO analysis of 2021–2024 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) and Current Population Survey data. | GAO-26-107871

Notes: Primary child care is when the caregiver's primary focus is helping or caring for a child (e.g., reading to a child), according to ATUS. GAO defined married individuals as living with their spouse or partner and unmarried individuals as not married or not living with their spouse or partner.

Why GAO Did This Study

Millions of people spend time on unpaid household work each day. Unpaid household work is work someone does for their household that someone else could do for pay.

GAO was asked to examine how unpaid household work contributes to the economy and whether a better understanding of this work could help inform policy. This report (1) describes how estimating the time and monetary value of unpaid household work can supplement economic data and inform caregiving policy; (2) estimates the time spent on this work and its monetary value; and (3) determines the characteristics of individuals who do this work.

To inform all objectives, GAO reviewed studies on unpaid household work in the U.S. that had strong research methods; and interviewed economists knowledgeable about estimating the time and value of this work.

To estimate the time spent on unpaid household work, GAO analyzed nationally representative ATUS data from 2021–2024, which were the most recent data available at the time of GAO's review. GAO estimated the monetary value of this work by multiplying hours from the ATUS by median hourly wages from the 2024 Current Population Survey (CPS). For most types of unpaid work, GAO selected both lower and higher wages to show how the value changes based on the wages used. GAO also analyzed 2021–2024 ATUS and CPS data to describe the characteristics of individuals engaged in this work. Both ATUS and CPS are federally funded surveys.