

BIG STORY 10

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'Unpaid and unseen': Female workers bolster Britain's economy

Sarah Shearman



LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Young women are totting up the hours of unpaid work they do - from childcare to housework - to invoice Britain's Treasury and highlight their undervalued contribution to the economy.

The Young Women's Trust (YWT) on Wednesday launched an online calculator enabling women to work out and share online the value of their unpaid work - from cooking and cleaning to caring for sick relatives and providing emotional support.

"This is very much seen as women's work ... it's unpaid and unseen but it is still nonetheless banked by the government because that work supports economic choice for other people," said Sophie Walker, chief executive of YWT.

Using government data on women's unpaid work, the charity estimated that women aged 18 to 30 contribute about 140 billion pounds (\$179 billion) to Britain's economy - more than the finance sector.

Gender inequality has persisted across the globe, with women performing three-quarters of unpaid work, according to the United Nations' International Labour Organization.

YWT research with young women with experience of unpaid work found many wanted paid employment but felt trapped by family obligations. Some feared negative responses from family members for not doing it.

“These testimonies are clear examples of economic abuse ... What we are demonstrating is that there is clear structural sexism that kicks in for young women’s lives from very early on,” said Walker, former leader of the Women’s Equality Party.

The charity is calling on the British government to recognise the contribution women make and to increase the carer’s allowance, a benefit paid to people on low incomes who look after someone for 35 hours a week or more.

Reporting by Sarah Shearman @Shearmans. Editing by Katy Migiro. Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers the lives of people around the world who struggle to live freely or fairly. Visit <http://news.trust.org>

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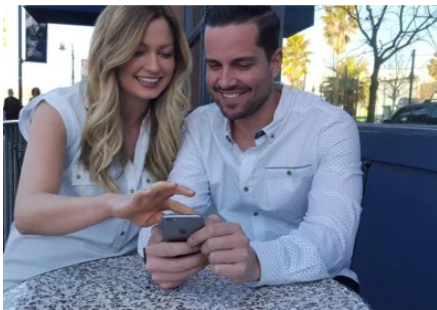
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