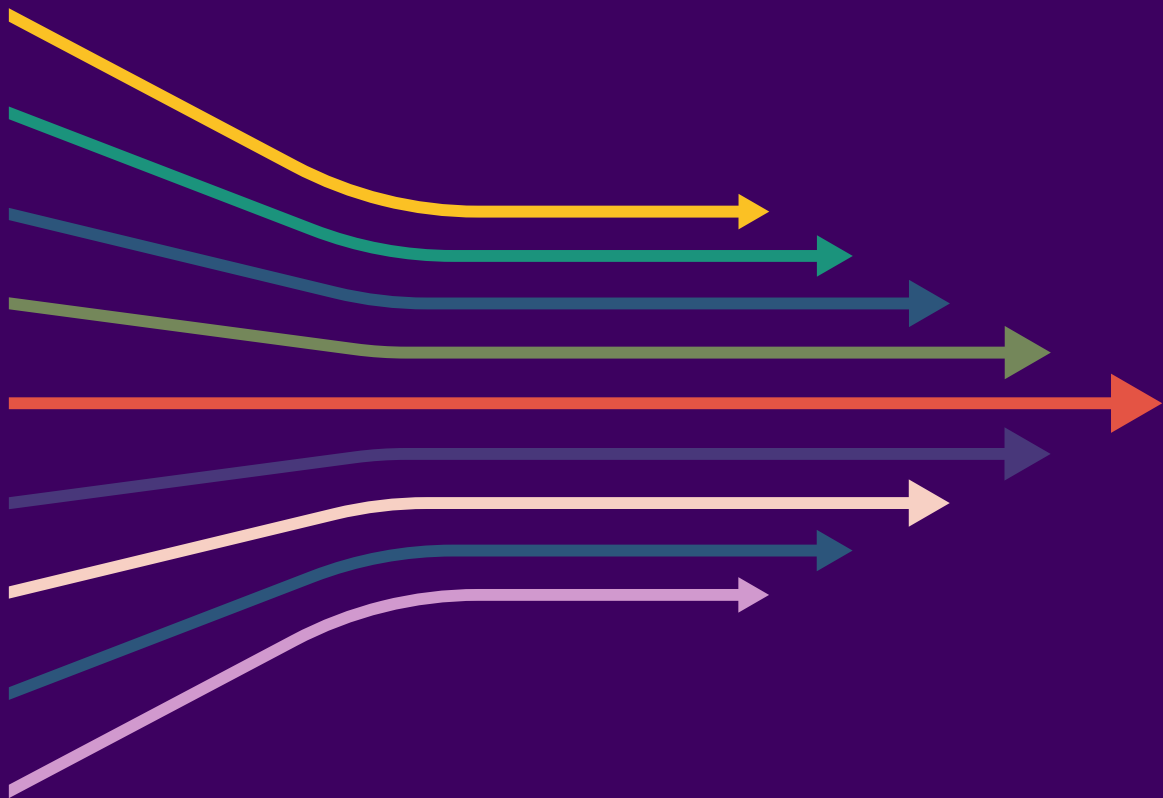


BEYOND GDP



Executive Summary

Economic statistics are used for deciding spending priorities and set levels of tax. They have a fundamental influence on the lives of people, and yet few know what they even measure.

These statistics also attempt to measure something intangible – the size of the economy, living standards and productivity. These are all abstract ideas, and great care needs to be taken to ensure that we are including everything that is important.

If we are to have statistics that measure what is important and drive policy making towards addressing those issues, then we need to ensure that the widest range of people have a say in what we measure and how it is presented.

Women have historically been ignored when formulating economic policy and the statistics that we use show this. Gross Domestic Product is still a statistic that is used for measuring growth in the economy and so is fundamental to decision making, yet it is a statistic that is recognised to miss a lot of what is important. Most notably for women it does not attempt to understand the contribution of unpaid work to a healthy, functioning economy.

The Women's Budget Group ran workshops with a wide range of women's organisations to enable discussion and learning about what economic statistics mean and what is important for development work so that the experiences of women are seen.

Suggestions for development are aimed at policy makers, statisticians and researchers. They cover not only the pro

- Work with organisations of people that carry out unpaid care work to establish ways of measuring the contribution they make in a helpful way.
- Prioritise measures of wellbeing that link to human rights and understand the consequences of dissatisfaction for any wellbeing measure.
- Ensure that any statistic that shows a significant difference between men and women is presented in a disaggregated form.
- Ensure that people and their contributions are central to any report on the economy.

Engagement with users and stakeholders needs to be a top priority of researchers, statisticians and policy experts. This leads to a better understanding of needs and therefore better statistics for the public good.

Introduction

'We live in a society in which a priesthood of technically trained economists, wielding impenetrable mathematical formulas, set the framework for public debate'

(Pilling, 2018)¹

The term Gross Domestic Product (GDP) looms large in economic policy making. Few people outside of economic circles know exactly what it measures.

At the same time the use of GDP as the main measure of the health of the economy has been widely criticised. It has recognised shortcomings, such as its failure to take into account unpaid work. This leaves many people, particularly women, who carry out the majority of unpaid work, feeling that the success or otherwise of economic policy is judged against criteria which does not include the things that they see as most important. Unpaid work can account for significant amounts of time and energy and has consequences for the ability to do paid work while remaining not accounted for in GDP.

These deficiencies have been acknowledged by international organisations including the UN (United Nations) and OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)²³ as well as by campaigners and many economists. But all too often debate about possible alternatives take place in academia or among policy makers, and does not include the wider public, or advocacy organisations that deal with the consequences of economic policy, such as how these policies affect individuals.

If the voices and needs of women in all their diversity are not included in this work, then there is the danger that any new measures will still fail women in economic decision making. Women's organisations have frontline experience of knowing what issues women raise. Gaining this perspective and feeding it into the debate is therefore crucial if new measures are to be robust and reflective of the priorities of women. Policy and commissioning of services can then be better informed of gendered issues and therefore, better able to respond to women's needs. The use of economic statistics to drive debate in public policy also means that organisations that advocate for changes on specific issues need training in how to access, interpret and use these statistics in their work.

In order to widen the debate about additions or alternatives to GDP, Women's Budget Group organised, with support from Oxfam, a series of workshops with women's groups, advocates and grassroots organisations to discuss what they considered most important when measuring the health of the economy. This report discusses these workshops and the suggestions that were

¹ Pilling, D (2018) *The Growth Delusion, The Wealth and Wellbeing of Nations*, Bloomsbury, London.

² https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2018/11/beyond-gdp_g1g98ae6.html

³ <https://unsceb.org/valuing-what-counts-united-nations-system-wide-contribution-beyond-gross-domestic-product-gdp>

made by the participants with a view to inform debate around the development of measures and to policy makers in the UK.

The workshops were held in June 2024 during the run up to the general election. This backdrop to discussions illustrated how important engagement and understanding of economic statistics are. Election debates are often focussed on strengthening the economy and the need for economic growth in order to pay for public services. But what is meant by growth is rarely explained. We set out to do things differently.

What were the aims of the workshops?

- Informing interested women's organisations, groups and feminist activists about the meaning of GDP
- Sharing alternative models for discussion
- Consulting on what they think the priorities should be
- Learning about how to conduct engagement in economic debate
- Networking and capacity building

The workshops aimed to inform and consult with women's organisations in England at national and local levels about work that is happening in developing statistics that go beyond measuring GDP to a more comprehensive analysis of prosperity and wellbeing. In the United Kingdom, this work is being led by the Office of National Statistics and is regularly reported on through articles and meetings.

Economic statistics are not only used by policy makers, but they also frame public debates about the economy. Nevertheless, few people feel confident in talking about the economy, particularly when discussion is overloaded with numbers and terminology that are not properly explained. Large numbers such as billions and trillions as well as percentages are usually hard to grasp by the general public, especially without context or comparison. Coming together in an informal workshop space allowed people to strengthen their knowledge, test their ideas, ask questions and gain confidence.

The workshops were not just for people who are new to the subject, however. Participants were recruited through the Women's Budget Group networks and a high percentage of them already had an excellent knowledge of GDP and the debate around it. A full list of organisations that attended is included as an appendix. These participants gained greatly from attending the workshops because of the role that economic statistics play in the work they do advocating, influencing and persuading. They were able to meet people who are campaigning on women's issues, understand the current issues and gain an insight into how different measurements could be used and the problems of some alternative proposals.

Description of the Approach

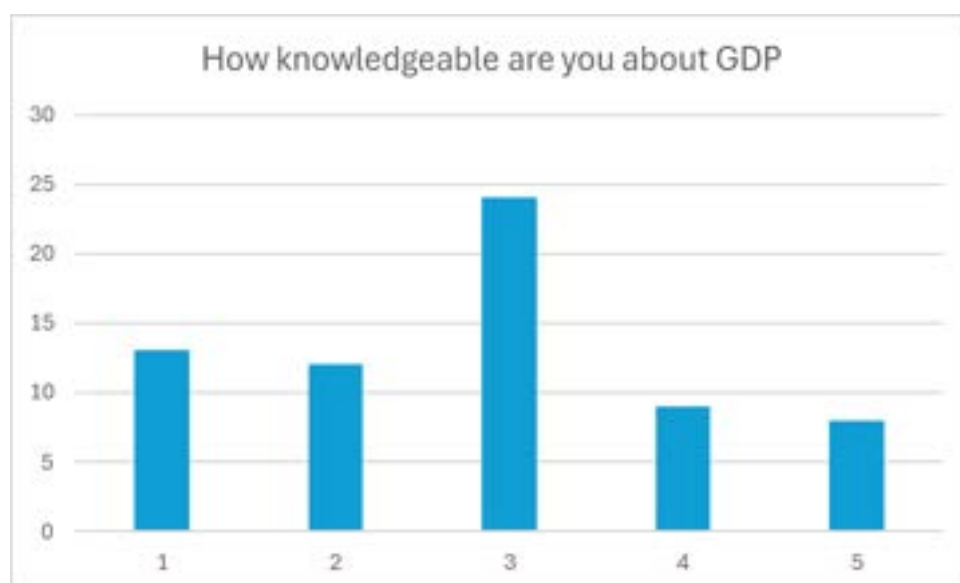
- In person to allow conversation and exchange of ideas
- Design of an event that was positive and collaborative
- Partnering with local organisations to improve reach
- Invitations to a wide range of organisations e.g. political, advocacy, academic and grassroots
- Plenty of time in the workshops given to group exercises based on published statistics
- Capture of debate and thoughts
- Pre workshop questions to assess prior knowledge and engagement

Our starting point in organising the workshops was the understanding that all participants, whether academics, campaigners or from grassroots organisations, all have expertise. We wanted to create a space for interaction where everyone could meet as an equal in order to generate a rich discussion and allow everyone to challenge their own assumptions and learn.

Some participants needed to be encouraged to join because they had fears that they wouldn't understand the topic. However, because of the existing relationship of trust built up through previous work with the Women's Budget Group, they were reassured that they would find the discussions accessible and would have important things to contribute. The Women's Budget Group has worked closely with academic partners for decades, so we were also joined by researchers with an academic interest in economics and gender equality.

Pre workshop questionnaires were sent to all participants. This gave some information about the previous knowledge of the debate and the technical skills that they had.

Prior to the workshops, participants were invited to grade themselves out of 5 for their knowledge of GDP. The results are shown below:



With an increasing move to events taking place online, we felt it was important that these workshops take place in person to allow people to have informal conversations and get to know each other in a way which is not possible in a virtual meeting. Creating a space and time that enables participants to feel secure and relaxed takes careful curation.

Networking was encouraged from the beginning through the use of delegate packs. Pre-registered delegates were asked to provide a brief biography that were collated and presented with contact information. This made it easier for people to identify the people they wanted to network with and reach out to.

Issues covered in the workshop

- How does change happen and what is your role?
- What is GDP?
- What does it measure and what does it leave out?
- Understanding of mainstream thought in this debate
- Wellbeing measures
- Measuring and valuing unpaid work, particularly care
- Definitions of terms used to discuss economic policy

Presenting Gross Domestic Product

The workshops used current statistical bulletins published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and mainstream economic institutions such as the Bank of England. to present the main features of the debate about the strengths and weaknesses of GDP and alternative measures.

It was important that publicly available statistics were looked at during the workshops, rather than simplified models and token numbers that are sometimes used when teaching mathematics. The essence of good statistics is the production of numerical data that is illustrative of real-world concepts. Many of the participants to the workshop were not familiar with the details of the production of the statistics but they were all heavily involved with the concepts and the issues being discussed. This meant that with some thoughtful explanation of the methods and language, all participants were able to interpret the information to fully participate in the debate.

The day was split into sections covering the issues above. The sections included collaborative exercises followed by in-depth discussion to stimulate debate around key issues with GDP and by examining the following publications and data sets:

- The GDP bulletin
- The ONS Wellbeing dashboard
- Time Use Surveys
- Methods for calculating a monetary value of unpaid care

Advocacy and Change

Public debate is a complex ecosystem of organisations and advocates. Some of these are visible and formal, others are less visible and informal. The most visible are able to share their messages more easily, but unless these visible organisations are talking about what matters to the wider public, then their messages will fail to land. If this does not happen then policy change and economic decision making will not reflect these priorities.

During the workshop, information and evidence was shared to show that statistics are not produced in a vacuum and no data whether quantitative or qualitative is entirely objective. Methods of data collection, the questions that are asked, how observations are categorised; these are all choices that must be made. When producing data there are always compromises and the real-world impact of statistics is dependent on how they are used or misused. For datasets and metrics to be adopted they must illustrate and promote ideas that make sense to the user. Within feminist approaches lived experience is valued, and this experience should also be used to inform the collection of data by organisations involved in policy making. This way, data is able to reflect those experiences. The production of gender disaggregated statistics is a minimum requirement, but we can go further and ask for gender sensitive statistics that capture the experiences of women, for example with transport surveys, a category on care related journeys would impact the way the data is captured and understood in relation to the experiences of caregivers, who are often women. Participants to the workshops had key priorities for what they wanted to see in alternatives to GDP.

“Challenging/adjusting traditional perspectives. Valuing women's contributions. Valuing unpaid work.” -Workshop participant

To ensure that participants who may have felt unsure of their expertise felt welcome and were encouraged to take part, the day started with an exercise to help them consider their role in public debate. A diagram showing two axes of formal to informal and invisible to visible were stuck to the wall and everyone was encouraged to think about where their organisation fitted into the framework. This exercise also helped participants to start working together and listening to each other's experiences. In the discussion following the exercise, they reflected on how they could promote the use of a wider range of statistical ideas based on their diverse experiences.

Gross Domestic Product and What it Measures

Understanding what GDP measures and what it does not was the starting point of the workshops so that everyone had a base knowledge from which we could discuss options.

The workshop introduced how GDP is measured and what it does and does not contain. It also drew from established criticisms of GDP which could then be discussed in a specific feminist view. The content was mostly drawn from materials produced by the Bank of England.

There are three ways that GDP is measured:

- The total value of goods and services ('output') produced
- Everyone's income
- What everyone in the country has spent

The Bank of England acknowledges that GDP does not tell the whole story of how well an economy is doing:

- Some things of value like caring for an elderly relative or children are not captured because no money changes hands
- GDP does not tell us how income is split
- You need to take into account the size of the population

From this initial discussion the issues that were most important to the participants could be drawn out:

- Unpaid care and domestic work that is largely done by women is not included
- It takes no account of the environment
- Distribution of wealth and benefits are not dealt with
- Use of the term "productive" in a purely monetary way

A short video produced from the Bank of England YouTube channel called "Why Does Economic Growth Matter?"⁴ was shown. This video was selected because part of it addressed these points. The biggest snorts of disbelief from the entire workshop came when the video claimed that there was a link between high growth and raises in living standards. The experience of many participants was of dealing with the consequences of inequality and low living standards in a rich country.

"Dealing with those who are at the 'sharp end' is depressing and infuriating. GDP does not take into account those who are struggling to make it through each day." -Workshop participant

The use of GDP as the sole metric for the health of the economy was particularly criticised by participants. Its use for decision making was particularly commented on since the issues that GDP excludes are some of the most important issues to the organisations attending. While it was recognised that GDP does measure something -the movement of money in the economy- and that this could be important, it was felt that complementary measures should also be used. The Office of National Statistics regularly publishes other measures, yet these rarely inform decision making.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWznhE2jEUA>

"[We need to]...find a way to demonstrate all the other factors of a growing and sustainable economy and population, potentially through multiple robust measures."-Workshop participant

Even participants to the workshops who had some prior knowledge of GDP had never had the opportunity to look at the bulletin that is produced by the Office of National Statistics and or see what is reported on and how GDP figures are broken down. Participants were guided through how to understand the bulletin, including the glossary of terms, how GDP figures can be revised and the breakdown of contributions to GDP.

This was seen as a useful exercise, even by those that had no experience of discussing GDP. The use of the real statistics, not a mock up, may have been intimidating to some at first, but was valued as it helped to get to the authentic issues in economic decision making. Through group work and a guided set of questions aimed to increase comprehension, participants were guided to look at the most important charts in the bulletin to see how GDP is actually calculated.

"Alternative measure to GDP are critical to grasp the full extent of the economy including paid and unpaid work and how women and men contribute their time, skills and resources." -Workshop participant

The discussions following the examination of the GDP bulletin were largely concerned with the language that was used and how GDP is presented in a way that is removed from any human experience. The terminology used presents the rises and falls of GDP similarly to natural phenomena, so that changes are talked about in the abstract with no reference to the human activity involved. It was noted that in the whole of the GDP bulletin there was not one reference to people.

Suggestions from participants

- More work to be done on understanding the link between GDP growth and wellbeing of different demographics
- Understanding of the distribution of economic benefits
- Consideration of language to show that GDP growth does not happen without people
- Further training and engagement for organisations that deal with the outcomes of economic decisions on how those decisions are made
- Work with international organisations to understand the role of international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The Wellbeing Dashboard

In the discussions on how to move on from just understand the economy in terms of GDP, the idea of a wellbeing economy is a popular one. The model that was most recognised among the participants of the workshops was the Doughnut Economics model developed by Kate Raworth⁵. This model had been used by some participants. There were women present from a group in Milton Keynes, who had used it. However, the model has many different sections to it and finding the data for the analysis was difficult for even the most data literate.

In the workshops we examined the Wellbeing dashboard that has been developed by the ONS as part of its Beyond GDP work.⁶

The dashboard contains 59 measures of well-being, grouped by 10 topic areas. Out of the 59 measures, only 29 of the are an objective measurement of something, particularly in the economic and environmental sections The other measures are a measure of people's feelings or satisfaction. Only four of the measures are gender disaggregated: Healthy Life Expectancy, Time Spent on Unpaid Work, Feeling Safe and the Gender Pay Gap.

There was not enough time in the workshop to enable participants to think about each separate measure, so the task was divided up and pairs of people considered five measures each and reported back on what they thought in a group discussion.

Generally, the focus on wellbeing was welcomed, but further work should be done to contextualise and understand the consequences of the measures. It was also noted with dismay that not many measures were gender disaggregated.

Loved the ONS wellbeing dashboard. This will enrich my case studies, other data I have. This will help me to advocate, provide local services, and these measurements, data learning to other communities I know, work and feel would be of use to other feminists.

The discussion largely focussed on whether objective or subjective measures should be used.

Interpretation of whether a level of satisfaction was acceptable greatly depended on the personal experience of the person reading the dashboard.

For example, satisfaction with accommodation was measured at 87.8% in May 2024. This number seems like a high figure, but the question of why people who reported dissatisfaction did so remains. Are these people dissatisfied because they want to have a larger garden, but otherwise live in decent accommodation, or are they living in insecure accommodation, or accommodation that is detrimental to health? The likelihood of a reader choosing one answer, or another will depend on their own experiences and that of their social and family groups. For participants with

⁵ <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>

⁶

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/ukmeasuresofnationalwellbeing/dashboard>

the most experience of negative consequences there could be no compromise. Participants also noted that some measures should be considered more important than others and that there was a link for some of them to human rights principles, such as housing, which would make them more important.

Some subjects as housing, health and food measurements should be taking as reaching 100% and don't be acceptable anything under these numbers.

Many participants are engaged in campaigning and advocacy. They were asked whether they thought the Wellbeing dashboard was a useful tool for them to highlight and track issues that were important to them. The response was generally positive although participants needed more time to think about the dashboard and consider all of the measures, rather than the selection that they had time for.

Linking the wellbeing measures to other frameworks, both economic or wellbeing related, was seen as another step that needed to be taken before the measures on the dashboard could be used effectively.

This heavily ties into my background in public health and the factors that impact the overall health and wellbeing of all people. Public health frameworks has a solution for many of these issues as it offers a more preventative perspective.

Suggestions on Wellbeing Dashboard

- Linking measures to human rights: There is no weighting to the measures, but some have a more profound effect on wellbeing than others. There are some measures that have a link to human rights, such as a right to education. Using a human rights framework offers an opportunity to analyse priorities in wellbeing.
- Gender disaggregation: Currently there are only four measures that are disaggregated on the dashboard these are, Healthy Life Expectancy, Time spent on unpaid work, Feeling Safe and Gender Pay Gap. These represent some of the priorities of feminist organisations, but not all of them. Where we know that there is a significant difference between values for men and women these measures should be presented in a disaggregated form to highlight inequality and to allow for gender mainstreaming in policy making.
- Development of gender sensitive economic measures: There is a section of measures on Personal Finances. Currently these rely on household level data which erases gender differences within a household. While the gender pay gap is reported, this measure is flawed as an absolute measure of women's capability. Further work on individual measures of poverty and income should be developed to replace household level data.
- Agreement on priorities: There are too many measures for effective policy prioritisation. The current measures should be examined with a gender lens so an agreement can be formed over which represent feminist priorities.
- Supplementing measures with case studies: It has been noted that subjective measures do not offer an explanation for dissatisfaction. Feminist organisations should be ensuring that the consequences and reasons for dissatisfaction are fully understood.

Understanding Unpaid Work

One of the main feminist critiques of using GDP as the sole measure for understanding the economy is that it overlooks the contribution of unpaid work, particularly care work, to the economy. This work is essential to the functioning of the economy and yet is often not included in mainstream economic statistics, like GDP. It is also work that is mostly undertaken by women.

The workshops introduced the methods that have been used to calculate the contribution of unpaid work. These methods try to put a monetary value on unpaid work and include the opportunity cost approach, replacement cost approach and the replacement cost of a so-called substitute. These methods give different monetary values to an hour of unpaid work, depending on whether it is valued by the normal wage of the person performing the work, or by the wage of professionals or at minimum wage.⁷ Each method has criticisms, the purpose of the exercise was to explore how different the results of each method were and whether participants thought one was fairer than the others based on their experiences of unpaid work and its impact on them.

Participants were given a pre-designed spreadsheet that enabled them to see which figures were used in the different approaches and to have a go at entering figures to see how the overall estimate of the value of unpaid work changes.

Participants were given relevant figures from ONS time use surveys, hourly rates of professionals, or they were asked to use their own figures, based on their own assignments of monetary values of tasks and activities related to care. The figures were also presented in a gender disaggregated way so that calculations based on disaggregated data were possible.

The discussion following the exercise was concerned with the way in which time use was calculated, the application of putting a monetary value on unpaid work and whether it was desirable to combine these figures with GDP.

The contribution of unpaid work is a gendered issue especially care and any work developing new statistics should incorporate the experiences of women. Statistics from time use series show that, on average, men spend a total of 149.1 minutes per day on unpaid childcare, adult care or unpaid household work. Women spend an average of 218.5 minutes per day on the same tasks⁸. The average figure available through the ONS does not give figures for the median time spent, nor information about the distribution of these times. If the distribution was asymmetrical, then the mean and the median figures would be different, this would show that there is an uneven burden of care work in the population. Data from the 2021 census on how much unpaid care people provide showed an uneven distribution with 91% of responders providing no unpaid care and 2.7% providing more than 50 hours a week. It should be noted that for a lot of unpaid carers it takes more than full time hours to provide the care for which they get £81.90 a week in carers allowance. The

⁷ Özge İzdeş Terkoğlu, İpek İlkaracan, Emel Memiş and Yelda Yücel (2017) The UN Women Gender And Economics Training Manual available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/the-un-women-gender-and-economics-training-manual>

⁸ ONS Time Use Survey March 2024

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/timeuseintheuk>

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data shows that there were 1,004,960 people in receipt of carers allowance in Great Britain in February 2024. 72.5% of these people were women⁹. These stark figures point to the need for further development work on the production and publication of data on unpaid work so that available data reflects the realities of people providing care and their role in the economy.

“Very important to value unpaid work = love is not always enough.”- Workshop participant

Time Use Surveys are a key part of being able to understand how much time is given to caring and what the gender split is of those providing care. The workshops used the current ONS data on time use¹⁰ which are currently designated as experimental statistics. This means that they are official statistics that still being tested and are not fully developed. There was some scepticism about whether this dataset could be used to understand the contribution of unpaid care work, many of the participants were carers of children or adults and had criticisms of the approach, including the use of just the mean and the way in which time use was categorised. As this dataset is developed it would benefit from the input of the people that it is attempting to measure.

*“Adding up women's unpaid hours was a shocking realisation of how much is missing from GDP.”-
Workshop participant*

It is not clear if the data for unpaid work and care includes time spent doing activities related to that care work, such as travel. The time taken to travel to a hospital or take children to school is time essential to the care work and is unavailable for other use such as paid work or leisure but may not have been included in the time spent on care. Care often involves time spent doing something else at the same time, such as housework or watching TV, but time use surveys of this type do not account for this nor the consequences this has on the ability to do paid work. This was an area that generated a lot of discussion from experience, and further development of the official statistics should consider these perspectives.

Because some participants in the workshops were unpaid carers, or represented them, some discussion drew on other research. One of the emerging themes of discussions was how statistics are used in decision making and if they enable positive change for the people being measured, and valuing unpaid work was the topic where this was most apparently missing.

Carers UK has produced the most detailed analysis of the contribution of unpaid care¹¹ giving it a value of £162 billion, equivalent to the budget of the NHS. While this figure shines a spotlight on how valuable unpaid carers are, the question remains whether this methodology would lead to the

⁹ Figures obtained through Stat Xplore 18/09/2024

¹⁰ [Time use in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/time-use-in-the-uk)

¹¹ [Valuing Carers research report | Carers UK](https://www.carersuk.org/research/valuing-carers-research-report)

change that we need, namely support for those people who provide the care so that caring does not become detrimental to well-being. The unpaid carers who were part of the discussion felt that putting a monetary figure on the contribution did not give them the change they need.

“As unpaid carers, we're often told that we provide care worth £162 billion a year in England and Wales. But what does that really achieve? It lets the government, organisations, and the public pat us on the head and say, 'Aren't you amazing?' while nothing changes for us. These numbers don't shift the conversation or move us any closer to getting the support we actually need.” -Workshop participant

Suggestions from participants on Unpaid Work

- Work with organisations of people that carry out unpaid care work and those who represent carers to fully include their experience into the design and publication of time use surveys.
- Consider what placing a total monetary figure on the value of unpaid work has on supporting those people who do it. There should be further discussion about how the people, mostly women, who do the work are featured in economic reports and how economic policies can be better informed by these reports.
- Ensure that any measure that attempts to combine paid and unpaid work are explicit about the split in a way that unpaid work is clear. Therefore, that any transfer of work from paid to unpaid, or increase in unpaid work, as happens following public spending cuts, is not heralded as a success for the economy.
- Consider measures that show the cost to people of doing unpaid work, as well as its contribution to the national economy.

Language

The choice of language used in economic statistics was a constant conversation throughout the workshops. The way in which terms are used in reporting of economic stories in the press was also discussed.

“Journalists should stop using political jargon eg 'tax burden' and 'maxing out the credit card” - Workshop participant

Feminist critiques of the use of quantitative data have highlighted how official statistics have for a long time ignored women's perspectives. This has led to a preference among some feminist researchers for qualitative research. For economists and statisticians, there is an opposing issue that they should be mindful that the numbers they produce, and quote are actually reflective of the phenomena they are discussing. Their use of language should therefore be precise to ensure they are not unintentionally excluding experiences of people they are studying.

“Centering people in the narrative. It’s a bit wild that people aren’t mentioned once in the GDP release.” -Workshop participant

There were some terms that came under particular criticism:

Economy

When referring to the size of the economy it is commonly understood that this refers to the measure of GDP. This leads to a curious person-free vision of the economy -that is made of cogs and levers- but does little to identify the true nature of it, which is the sum total of human activity. It was noted in many discussions that conversations about the economy are cold and abstract that more focus on enabling people would be beneficial. It was also noted that as it is acknowledged that GDP was not a complete measure, it is advised to be supplemented with other measures as much as possible whenever it is used as a figure.

Economically Inactive

This term is used to distinguish between people who do not have a paid job but are seeking one, and those who are not in paid employment but not seeking employment. It was felt that the term was bordering on insulting for those who do not have paid employment because they are doing essential work such as care. As it is noted in discussions on GDP, it does not capture everything that is important to an economy. A better term is needed for those who are contributing in ways that GDP ignores.

Productivity

The definition of productivity, as used in economic reporting, is the amount of output measured in GDP for an hour’s input. This definition ignores work that does not come into the boundary of GDP. What is a more productive use of time than giving essential care to another person?

Tax Burden

This term refers to the amount of tax paid. It is a negative term; payment of taxes is essential for investment in services and the essentials that we need. It should not be framed in this way.

Investment

Investment is often understood as the generation of profit. Participants were critical of this as it reflects their criticisms of the undervaluing of unpaid work. If we are to include the contribution of unpaid work, then we similarly need to find ways of discussing how we can empower this work. Feminist economics has a wide body of work on how spending on the social infrastructure of services should be considered as investment.

Workshop Evaluation

The results of the post course feedback were unanimously positive. All participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they workshops had been engaging, well delivered and gave them a better understanding of the issues. Some participants even said that they found the day fun, even if they weren't expecting to.

"I didn't expect to understand/enjoy as much as I did. Very relevant and thought provoking. Highly recommend to anyone who needs to talk economics in person." – Workshop participant

The mix of different organisations was a feature that was particularly valued because of the quality and range of debate that it ensured and because it gave participants a chance to network.

"It was engaging, useful. Range of people attending was wonderful. So helpful, great networking and great facilities and menu." Workshop participant

As well as the standard feedback, participants were asked how they could use different measures. For new statistics to gain recognition they need to be used and discussed, and advocacy has an important role in this. The use of statistics in advocacy as a supplement to storytelling and qualitative data was an area that was emphasised.

"Helps highlight/ indicate deeper issues to be looked into. Also helps illustrate/ give us a narrative as whats actually happening in people's lives." Workshop participant

How a wider range of measures can be used by advocacy and policy organisations to identify what is happening and the areas that they could work on was also a priority. It was recognised that examining metrics that go beyond GDP is informative in equalities work.

"Identifying policy areas to focus on. Amplifying women's voices in policy agendas - and working with a more intersectional lens generally. Supporting arguments for investment and stimulus. Building towards a fairer more equal economy that serves everyone." Workshop participant

Conclusions

Statistics should be used to turn real life experiences into data that can be used as the basis for well-informed decision making that can consider different perspectives leading to actions beneficial to all. We live in an age where more and more data sets are being produced. The production and use of this data requires us to constantly examine whether the data that is relied on is not only accurate but gives a complete picture of what is important.

The one-day workshops showed the desire to understand the economy beyond GDP statistics and examined some of the feminist critiques. This is an ongoing discussion, and as new proposals are put forward by the ONS they should be tested in a similar forum so that the benefits and drawbacks of new methods can be debated.

“The exercise we did on the value of unpaid work made it clear how complicated the inclusion of this would be and the difficulty of measurement on the validity of including different forms of activity”- Workshop participant

The workshops were designed from the outset to widen the debate around economic measures and their use in decision making. They deliberately used real, publicly available statistics produced by the ONS with guidance on how to approach them and interpret them. Rather than being put off by this approach, the participants welcomed the opportunity to have their say about some of the most important debates without being patronised. All the participants brought valuable experience and expertise to the discussion that should be considered as work continues on developing existing statistics and producing new ones.

The UN statistical commission has endorsed the use of the Copenhagen framework on citizen data¹². This framework lays out methods that can be used for the co-production of data. For its adoption, national statistical agencies such as the ONS need to consider how they approach organisations that have valuable experience of the subject matter. These workshops demonstrate an approach that can be taken.

The cross fertilisation of ideas between campaigners, academics and policy makers is a fruitful activity that deepens the understanding of everyone involved. It was a positive experience for all involved and one that can be used to examine other ideas that have complex societal ramifications. Through these methods we can examine what really matters to us.

¹² https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_55/documents/BG-4c-CGD_Framework-E.pdf

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